"THE AUSTRALIAN AND SPANISH-AMERICAN NOVEL OF THE LAND

An inquiry into some modern aspects of Pastoral"

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

HOBART

December 1970

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Desmond Cooper

Contents

SUMMARY

The novel of the land springs directly from colonial man's encounter with virgin continents: an interpretation of the colonial experience is to be expected, since it is a normal function of the novelist to interpret man and his world.

The Australian and Spanish-American novels of the land may validly be compared because of the intimate coincidence of subject matter, the identical European and cultural origins of the colonists, and because of the 19th. and 20th. Century appearance of the novel form in which writers articulate their interpretation of the emigrant venture.

The modern colonial novel of the land is deeply indebted to earlier pastoral, utopian and neo-platonic ideas, which are traced in considerable detail in the introductory chapter, and identified in others.

Examination of the literature of both continents reveals many areas of significant accord in their attitudes to Nature, and these are largely attributable to European cultural conditioning that transcends formal national differences. The important emergent themes are City versus Country, the Idealization of Rural Man and the Indigene, Aspiration towards the Simple Life, and Pastoral and Rural Utopianism. Both literatures see the moral stature of man as measured by his response to the new environmental challenge. They also reveal anxieties at the violation of Nature, and interpret the essentially masculine nature of the emigrant societies.

Significant differences emerge - the green hell theme and the cults of masculine aggressiveness in Spanish-American novels, and the historical land saga, and the transposition of land epic into universal allegory of the human condition in Australian writers. But for the rest, our interest resides not so much in social and other differences as in the treatment and colouring of comparable conditions that the new continental homelands imposed.

FOREWORD

In a comparative-literature study of this nature some selection of texts has been unavoidable, and I have accordingly set myself certain criteria to be met in such selection.

(i) All novels selected were to have the 'land' as a or the major theme.

(ii) Because of the considerable extent of the field, I decided to restrict myself to 20th. Century writers, and, unless other factors of importance forbade it, later rather than earlier writers of the century.

(iii) Furthermore, each writer was to be represented by no more than two works that might be considered as exemplifying the theme - provided this did not create any distortion by selection. Guiraldes and Rivera are writers whose reputations rest on one work only, so that no distortion was possible in their case. I had also hoped to include Reyles' Beba, but was unable to secure the work in Australia. However, El Terruño is massively explicit in its theme, and Reyles' view of life - his vision of the theme of the land - is, I think, fully propounded in this work.

(iv) I also felt it important to include Spanish-American writers of both tropical and temperate zones. In the case of tropical writers, their works embody important reactions to the natural world that are in marked contrast to those of writers of the European Romantic tradition. It was equally important to include some grain and livestock countries (Argentina and Uruguay) because of the obvious possibilities of interesting comparisons with

agricultural and pastoral Australia. I have also tried to preserve a regional emphasis in considering the Australian novel, and examine novels set in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, and the dead heart of the continent.

(v) A conviction that the claims of some writers must be allowed over those of others who might also be thought to shed light on the subject, because they penetrate their subject at greater depth, or because the land theme is more central to them, has also been important in the final selection of writers. Hence the omission of otherwise important novelists such as Franklyn, Furphy and Richardson.

(vi) In the case of both literatures, I have also sought to give a place to writers polarised by their extremely different interpretations of their subject - Prichard and Penton, for example, or Reyles and Rivera. Patrick White finds a place both for the importance of his treatment of the land theme, and for his literary uniqueness in Australian letters.

D.C.,
Lae,
New Guinea, 1970.

Chapter 1

Cultural and Historical roots of the pastoral idea

The novel of the European world is, generally speaking, sociological. Its centre of interest is man in his relationship to man. Only in the pioneer countries (North and South America, and Australia, for example), where European man has settled, leaving behind a physical world which he has long since controlled, does the earth-challenge reassert itself. In Spanish America to this day the physical fact of the land imposes itself upon man, challenging him to battle. His cities hug the coasts. The interior regions remain essentially unconquered. McAuley's lines about Australia aptly describe the Spanish-American condition too:

> Yet as a wheel that's driven in the ruts,
> It has a wet rim where the people clot
> Like mud; and though they praise the inner spaces
> When asked to go themselves, they'd rather not.

Attempts to penetrate and reduce the continental interior to human control are fiercely resisted. Not surprisingly, then, we find the land itself appearing in the Spanish-American novel as an antagonist to man, the unlisted protagonist in the dramatis personae, implacably hostile to human intrusion and blackly determined to contest his every attempt to advance. The resultant tension is what gives the Spanish-American novel of the land its peculiar flavour.

The literature of pioneering Australia offers the prospect of direct comparison with that of the trans-Pacific continent of South America, for here too, European man is the intruder, violating the established patterns and rhythms of the natural world, meeting the threat of a hostile environment that seeks by all means in its power to break and destroy him. And from the encounter emerges the Australian outback hero, who must prove his title to the earth he treads by meeting its challenge.

Here too the novel emerges out of the pioneering encounter with an extensive and untamed continent, which, like its Spanish-American counterpart, fights the intruder with lightning, storm, flood, drought and the strange terrors of its wild life. Opportunities for man to display his endurance and resilience, or lack of it, abound. But at the same time the experience searches out a man's moral quality and staying power: tests to which he would never be subjected in the civilised and protected environment of Europe meet him as part of the very texture of the life he is now called upon to face:

> The ability to call upon the unlikely and turn it into something that will do the improbable has some basis in the experience of the first people to tackle life on a continent not amenable to exploitation. They had to meet the strange land on its own harsh terms or lose in defeat their masculine ego. So, against strange trees, animals, soil, plants and climate, they fought their individual battles, adapting their weapons as they went along, until there emerged a breed of superb bushmen, capable of survival in all circumstances. (1)

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(1) F.C. Folkard, The Remarkable Australians, p.21, Murray, Sydney, 1965.

In a very real sense colonial man is projected back into his primitive, almost prehistoric, environment, in which his survival will depend upon his power to react effectively. E.M. Estrado, in a perceptive note on the impact of the new land on Argentinian settlers, makes the point succinctly:

> se obligaba al hijo de Europa y del siglo XVI en adelante, a someterse a la industria del primitivo; se le hacía retrogradar a la caverna para que pagera con el envilecimiento la fortuna. Los más dociles a la deformación prevalecían; los que más se sometieron tenían razón. Vinieron a ser máquina, herramiento del ganado y del cereal; se convertieron en pastores y en matarifes que iban a proveer de sustento al europeo, del que se habían apartado en millas de siglos ... la tierra que conquista al conquistador, lo vence y lo obliga a que se convierta en servidor de todo aquello que le repugna profondamente. (2)

> it forced the offspring of Europe and of the sixteenth century on to submit itself to the labour of primitive man. It forced him back to the cave, made him pay for his luck with abasement and degradation. Those most receptive to the "deformation" survived... They became slaves to cattle and grain. They were converted into pastors and slaughterhousemen, providing the European with his needs, and from whom they had been separated by miles of centuries ... the land conquers the conquistador, overcomes him and forces him to become the slave of all that he most deeply hates.

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(2) La Radiografía de la Pampa, p.15, Losada, S.A., 1968.

It is again a stark Darwinian world of the survival of the fittest. If, in the slowly growing coastal towns of Australia, the attempts to change the landscape to make it resemble that of the recently abandoned Europe, went on apace, and avenues of limes, oaks and elms, and formal lawns sprang into being, with an abundance of European spring and summer flowers too, this represented a nostalgic aspiration that was contradicted by the less tractable reality of the continent lying morosely to hand.

And yet the urge to conquer, to reduce the savage land to a state of quiescence, was as strongly felt by the Australian pioneer as it was for the South-American settler. The 'conquistador' spirit, the spirit of the conqueror, found its telluric protagonist in both southern continents. And whereas the indigenous inhabitant had come to terms with the land, seeking to cooperate with and

not to conquer the wilderness, European man can be content with nothing short of total conquest. Like Defoe's Crusoe, he must dominate his environment. It is the struggle that issues from this lust to subdue (Jung calls the European 'the Aryan bird of prey with his insatiable lust to lord it in every land - even those that concern him not at all' (3)) that provides the Spanish-American and the Australian novelist of the land with his centre of interest. And the literature of this encounter thus provides us with a literary interpretation of the emigrant and pioneering venture in the two continents.

There is, however, a certain coincidence of historical timing to be taken into consideration. The fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had, it is true, seen the first exploration and settlement of the South American continent (Hispanic navigators were also

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(3) Carl Jung, Modern Man in search of a Soul, p.246, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1966.

showing an interest in Terra Australis, the South Land, at that time too); but it was the eighteenth century which saw a massive immigration from Europe, strongly encouraged by South American governments, to redress the striking imbalance between Europeans and indigenees. R.A. Humphries notes that Argentina, Southern Brazil, Uruguay and Chile had an immigration comparable to that of the United States. (4) Between 1857 and 1930 more than six million immigrants entered, half of whom remained. As a result, Argentina became one of the great granaries of the world. The previous centuries had certainly done little to establish any degree of penetration or control of the South American hinterland:

> The early settlements were sparse, established primarily along the sea-board, in fertile inland valleys and in the regions of high native civilization, where man had already fought a successful battle against nature. These areas, Central Mexico, domain of the war-like Aztec, and Peru, seat of the Inca Empire, became, in fact, the chief territorial bases of the Spanish Empire in America. (5)

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(4) H. Blakemore, Latin America, p.59, OUP, 1966.
(5) ibid, p.39.

The great interior remained intact; the European and *casta* population still clung to the coasts. 'Through more than three centuries the cast of colonial life was so definitely urban that important events usually occurred in the towns.' (6) Moreover, the appearance of the novel in which the encounter with the land is articulated is in the case of both continents a nineteenth and twentieth century phenomenon concerned with a contemporary set of conditions. Thus the initial time disparity between the beginnings of the colonial movements of the two peoples (a *prima facie* objection to a comparative study of their literatures) is largely offset by this historical and literary hiatus. Nineteenth and twentieth century novelists are in both cases writing of a newly migrant European people established on the coasts of a continental land mass which represents a challenge to their further advance. The eighteenth century saw both a mass movement from Europe to

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(6) L. Hanke, *History of Latin American Civilization*, p.276, Vol.II, Methuen, N.J. 1969.

South America and the beginnings of colonization of Australia - a colonial foothold that in little more than half a century saw the great population accretions from the gold rushes (there are historic, through not chronologically coincident, echoes of the Spanish-American experience here too, in which the rush to the new world for gold was an important factor in transatlantic migration).

Ricardo Rojas, in his book Blasón de Plata (1910), developing his filosofía de la nacionalidad (philosophy of nationality), sees a germinal hiatus between the first hispanic colonial impulse of the sixteenth century and the emergence of a recognizably new (Argentinian) national type in the nineteenth century: tardó tres cientos años en crear el tipo nuevo, 'the new type did not emerge for three centuries'; there were, he says, tres siglos oscuros, 'three obscure centuries', de nuestra germinación colonial. (7) The point is well taken, and since most of the Spanish-

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(7) Blasón de Plata, pp.142, 116, Losada, S.A., 1954.

American colonies emerged into nationhood almost within the same quarter-century, after a similar colonial experience and, in most cases, after a similarly decisive encounter with the indigene., Rojas may be said to speak for the Spanish-American world. And it is this emergent world of the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries that the novelist seeks to interpret.

Australia, like Spanish America, is a cultural offshoot of Europe. It shares a common history and language with England, and in its literature feels itself to be an extension of the world of English letters; for although it has developed in a different physical environment - which it seeks to interpret in its literature - its linguistic, historic and psychic affinities remain as a present and permanent reality.

The Spanish colonial occupation of South America was originally a political and cultural unity under the rule

of Spain. The political fragmentation of the continent followed the revolt against Spanish home rule. But the linguistic and cultural unity remained, and the concept of "Latin" America remained an ideal anchored in an historical reality, and was fostered by Latin American social philosophers as worthy of preservation. (Even Portuguese Brazil has a sense of essential community with the rest of Latin America). Jean Franco remarks:

> For Rodó, the ideal of Latin America provided a supranational ideal that could bring the separate nations together and inspire individuals with a higher sense of purpose than mere national aims. Whereas a single country might have little in the way of cultural tradition, Latin America, taken as a whole, had an impressive tradition. Moreover, though nations were separated by differences, Rodó discovered among them a cultural unity. The concept of a Latin American identity arising from the cultural unity of the sub-continent was perhaps Rodó's most important contribution to the ideology of his day and was taken up by his contemporaries. Blanco Fombona, for instance, found in the literature of the separate republics a "family resemblance" which demonstrated the cultural unity of Latin America. Manuel Ugarte felt that, though "we call ourselves Argentinians, Uruguayans and Chileans ...we are above all Spanish-speaking Americans". Down to the present this ideal of the cultural unity of

> Latin America has attracted leading writers and thinkers, including men like José Vasconcelos (1882-1959) who, as Mexican Minister for Education in the nineteen-twenties, was to give practical impulse to the concept by inviting artists from all over Latin America to share in the new Mexican society. (8)

How long such a sense of cultural unity will survive we can have no means of knowing with any certainty. The fact is that it is a reality, and seems likely to endure indefinitely.

I make no apology, therefore, in assaying a comparative study of the literature of the continent of Australia, and that of the sub-continent of (Spanish?) South America, since the cultural integrity of both, despite the political fragmentation of the latter, may be conceived of as complete.

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(8) The Modern Culture of Latin America, p.52, Pall Mall London, 1967.

Looked at in literary perspective, the theme of civilized man and the primaeval land is not new. We may, indeed, see it as an old theme in a new guise. The literary ambivalence that sees the land as both a blessing and a curse is a reflection of the human dilemma itself: man both wishes to escape from the brutal challenge of the earth from which he has sprung, and, having done so, longs to return to it; and when he cannot do so, idealises it.

The pastoral ideal is certainly an ancient theme of literature and religion, the pastoral arcadia and utopia frequently going hand-in-hand. The pastoral idyll is finely epitomized in the Quijote of Miguel de Cervantes, as the following extract demonstrates:

> After Don Quixote had sufficiently satisfied his hunger, he took up a handful of acorns and, looking at them intently, gave utterance in the following strain: "Happy the age and happy the times on which the ancients bestowed the name of golden, not because gold, which in this iron age of ours is rated so highly, was attainable without labour in those fortunate times, but rather because the people of those days did not know those two words thine and mine. In that blessed age all things

were held in common. No man, to gain his common sustenance, needed to make any greater effort than to reach up his hand and pluck it from the strong oaks, which literally invited him to taste their sweet and savoury fruit. Clear springs and running rivers offered him their sweet and limpid water in glorious abundance. In clefts of the rock and hollow trees the careful and provident bees formed their commonwealth, offering to every hand without interest the fertile produce of their fragrant toil. Spontaneously, of sheer courtesy, the sturdy cork-trees shed their light and broad bark, with which men first covered their houses, supported on rough poles only as a defence against the inclemencies of the heavens. All was peace then, all amity, all concord. The crooked plough had not yet dared to force open and search the kindly bowels of our first mother with its heavy culter; for without compulsion she yielded from every part of her fertile and broad bosom everything to satisfy, sustain, and delight the children who then possessed her. Then did the simple and lovely shepherdesses go from valley to valley and from hill to hill, with their tresses loose, and without more clothes than were needed to cover what modesty requires, and has always required, to be concealed. Nor were there such ornaments as are in fashion today, all trumped up with Tyrian purple and silk in so many contorted shapes. Yet, with only new green leaves of dock and ivy plaited together, they must have looked as splended and elegant as our court ladies with the rare and outlandish inventions which idle curiosity has taught them. In those days the soul's amorous fancies were clothed simply and plainly, exactly as they were conceived, without any search for artificial elaborations to enhance them. Nor had fraud, deceit, or malice mingled with truth and sincerity. Justice pursued her own proper purposes, undisturbed and unassailed by favour and interest, which so impair, restrain, and pervert her today. The law did not depend on the judge's nice interpretations, for here were none to judge or to be judged. (9).

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(9) Don Quixote, pp.85-86, Penguin, U.K., 1952

Luis Weckmann, observing the strong effect of surviving mediaeval fantasy and tales of knight errantry (such as are satirized by Cervantes in the Quijote) on the Spanish mind, alludes to the conviction of Columbus that he had discovered the home of man's original innocence, the terrestrial paradise of Genesis, mistaking the delta of the Orinoco River for the four paradisial streams that flowed from the tree of life. (10) The new world afforded many such utopian hopes, all to be disappointed in their turn.

The utopian quest invariably involved the abandonment of sophisticated life as being beyond redemption. Those seeking the ideal world must leave their native shores to find a land unspoilt by man, where a fresh start can be made. Rousseau's hankering after the simple, primitive life of the savage (uncivilized) man - where art and

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(10) History of Latin American Civilization, 'The Transit of Civilization', (Hanke), Vol.I, pp.11, 12, Methuen, London 1969.

sophistication are at a discount, and where feelings, emotions and spontaneity, innate qualities in man, are elevated into primary virtues - lay behind the literary romantic movement. The dark satanic mills could not be cast down, but they could be fled. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the English romantics, led by Coleridge, planning a flight to the new world, America, to set up a new community in which the primary virtues should prevail. In its extreme development, the fugitive is a Byronic figure, negating society, a solitary rebel, and a law unto himself. Pantocracy, however, was never set up: it was drowned at birth by the conflicting currents of human nature. But utopia remained an allure, and looms large in the history of colonial migratory movements. Few stories make more instructive reading than the ill-fated Nueva Australia (New Australia) movement in Paraguay. William Lane's colony of ardent socialists sail from the shores of Australia for the Paraquay interior, deeply disenchanted with their

emigrant dreams of a socialist utopia in Australia, only to founder on the self-same rocks in South America, their motto Paz y Justicia (Peace and Justice) painfully unrealised. (11)

Vance Palmer, tracing the aspirations of the Australian utopians, led by Lane, who toured Australia in search of migrants for the Paraguayan venture, - 'a remote place cut off from the world' - likens him in zeal to Peter the Hermit. Disillusioned with what industrial civilization could offer, and aspiring to a return to the simple life, Lane, political utopian though he was, stands in the direct line of descent of that asceticism that flowered in the impulse towards hermitage - desert living - and, later, monasticism, with which early Christian ascetics

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(11) vide Gavin Souter's A Peculiar People, The Australians in Paraguay, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1968.

reacted towards the cruelty, licence and luxury of the Roman world. Palmer, indeed, points out the strong religious element in Lane's thinking, calling upon his hearers 'to come away from the spiritual emptiness of the life they knew, to go out into the wilderness, and putting aside all thoughts of comfort, live in the right way, as an example to those who had no faith.' (12)

The connection between the desire for the simple life and the monastic, the hermitage and the colonial impulse is detected by Patrick White:

> Sanderson was a man of a certain culture, which his passionate search for truth had rid of intellectual ostentation. In another age the landowner might have become a monk, and from there gone on to be a hermit. In the mid nineteenth century, an English gentleman and devoted husband did not behave in such a manner, so he renounced Belgravia for New South Wales, and learned to mortify himself in other ways. Because he was rich and among the first to arrive, he had acquired a goodish slice of land. After this victory of worldly pride, almost unavoidable perhaps in anyone of his class, humility had set in. He did live most simply, together with his modest wife. (Voss)

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(12) The Legend of the Nineties, p.86, Melbourne University Press, 1966.

All utopian movements have suffered a fate similar to Lane's. Philadelphia, 'the city of brotherly love', remains unbuilt, as inappropriately named as utopia (ου τοπος - no place) is well named, or as Samuel Butler's Erehwon (nowhere, spelt backwards). Similarly, the recent Victorian dream of a world flourishing under the aegis of science and empire, and unified by the labours of intrepid missionaries and colonial bishops (another florescence of the utopian hope), can now be seen for the hollow thing it was. Fitzgerald's reluctant cynicism was, perhaps, a more appropriate attitude to adopt, but the utopian yearning is present in him, nevertheless:

> Ah, Love! could thou and I with Fate conspire
> To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
> Would not we shatter it to bits - and then
> Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

It is a matter of some interest to note how often in utopian schemes, in both politics and literature, that ideal that lies close to the heart's desire is a pastoral,

nature-based, and an essentially anti-urban one.

Smith, in his European Vision in the South Pacific, has shown how much practical mariners and men of science were under the influence of neo-classical and utopian thinking when they made their incursions into the Pacific world. The belief in an original age of innocence, of an Edenic and classical golden age, still held the European imagination. Hankeworth's account of the natives of Tierra del Fuego, cited by Smith, shows the persistent influence of the notion of the primal innocence and blessedness of man in close contact with the earth: is he not far better off than European man? asks Fénelon in 1729, in a passage that closely parallels the Quijote already quoted, for he is not beset

> par l'ambition, par la crainte, par l'avarice, incapables des plaisirs purs et simples, puisque sont esclaves de tant de fausse necessitez dont ils font dependre tout leur bonheur. (13)

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(13) Fénelon, Les Aventures de Telemaque, 3rd.ed. Paris, 1739, i.315, cit. by Smith, European Vision in the South Pacific, p.23, Ox.Un. Press, 1960.

Banks and Bougainville reacted in the identical manner when their ships made contact with Polynesia, that is, as modern explorers whose outlook was conditioned by the neo-classical idea that was the matrix of European thought patterns. In Tahiti, Bougainville thinks himself "in the Elysian fields", "transported into the Garden of Eden", and the fine Tahitian bodily physique suggests nothing so much as sculptures of greek gods. Banks, too, thinks himself in a Polynesian Eden. (14) They perceive the remnants of the Golden Age still lingering, or think they do, although they are not blind to the darker side of that life.

The classical influence is clear: the South Pacific world is a (fallen) tropical Eden/Arcadia inhabited by a race of men like greek gods, and filled with the natural virtue of pastoral man; savage nobility inheres in him.

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(14) Smith, op.cit. p.25.

(Its opposite exists too. There is, as Smith also observes, the view of the Christian missions, that ignobility inheres in the indigene, the ignoble savage who must be raised up and saved from his savagery. Smith calls this a Calvinistic attitude, but the earlier catholic conquistadores had reacted with the same shocked horror.) Sir Walter Raleigh, several centuries earlier, also imagined he had found El Dorado in the Pacific. Professor Anderson Imbert remarks, too, on the fact that Columbus, the Genoese, was incapable of seeing the new world as it really was but must view it with eyes conditioned by mediaeval preconceptions:

> Upon reading Columbus' narrative, the Europeans confirmed old Utopian dreams and were able to give substance to two of the great themes of the Renaissance: natural man, happy and virtuous; and Nature, luxuriant and paradisiacal. Nevertheless, at the heart of the most vivid passages in Columbus' chronicle there was not a direct insight into America, rather a reflection, like clouds on a quiet lake, of traditional literary figures. Columbus moved with the Renaissance man's impulse of discovery, but his mind was still tempered in the medieval forge. Although he was not a man of letters he had read enough of real and imaginary voyages, of myths, ballads and folk tales that they had

> slipped into his spirit, coloring and transfiguring the reality of the New World; vegetation became a garden landscape; the birds of the Antilles, Provenzal nightingales; even the natives were poetized into ennobling engravings or into prodigious monsters. The promise of earthly paradise or of the land of the Amazons forever trembled on the horizon. (15)

One is reminded of those early paintings and engravings of Australia and the Pacific world: how totally unreal they are, how like the flora and fauna of Europe, only stylized.

Moorehead writes of the irresistible attraction that Tahiti had for European sailors, and notes that 'That is why Fletcher Christian and his followers so treacherously rebelled when the Bounty reached the Friendly Isles: they wanted to return to their Tahitian girls and the easy life.' (16) Gaugin arrives fifty years later to find Tahiti 'now tamed, compartmentalized, and finally civilized...appalled by the desecration of the islands by

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(15) Spanish-American Literature, p.12, Wayne State Uni. Press, trans. by J.V. Falconieri, 1963.

(16) The Fatal Impact, p.103, Penguin, U.K., 1968

the deadly hand of the white man.' (17) He also cites Beaglehole on the two marines, Webb and Gibson, who tried to escape from the Endeavour:

> The 18th.century sailor was confronted by the obvious contrast between his foc's'le and his work on one side, the unremitting demands of virtual imprisonment with hard labour at sea, and on the other what Bougainville had called New Cythera. Is it too fanciful, that name having been mentioned - is it to labour the point too much, to consider in that century the attractions of the art of escape? Consider the nostalgic and sentimental magic of Watteau's L'Embarquement pour Cythere, the sophisticated longing for the unreal, the transmutation of classical mythology in the age of reason. But the sophisticated Webb and Gibson did not need classical mythology, they walked straight into the golden age and embraced their nymphs. (18)

Nigel Gosling traces the passage of the pastoral ideal into the modern English tradition to the Franco-Italian painter Claude Lorrain. His canvasses presented a visual realisation of the pastoral-lyrical aspiration, and profoundly reimprinted the old notion upon the artistic and

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(17) ibid. p.124

(18) ibid. p.66

romantic consciousness of England. Keats composed a poem to one of his pictures, and the landscape artist, Constable, acknowledged his debt to Lorrain, whose

> paintings were imported in great numbers and passed into our thoughts about landscape, architecture, gardens and town planning ... He conjured up a totally integrated arcadia, an echo of the classic bucolic dream with all the roughness of a windless sea; the trees bend dark against a sky from which the light is just going to fade, while beside a moss-grown ruin figures stand in frozen opera poses. A shepherd plays a pipe, but there is no sound and nobody dances. Motion is suspended in a world too insubstantial to support it. (19)

Gosling sees the survival of the 'landscape as an idiom of the ideal' lasting down to the last war in England, and perishing when the winking city lights, the glass towers and the cinema finally conquered and art went metropolitan. For modern man there can be no entry into the paradise garden.

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(19) Nigel Gosling, 'No Entry into the Paradise Garden', Observer Review, p.32, London, 9.11.69.

Regressing to another of the founts of European culture, to the Book of Genesis, we find that man's true state of blessedness is a rustic paradise. It should not be forgotten, however, that the paradise pre-dates the Fall, and does not survive it: a parallel tradition is thus born, to become powerful literary motifs - that of a benign and beneficent Nature that is man's proper setting, and with which he lives in harmony and without labour, and that of a hostile natural world that is his enemy, that seeks to oppose and destroy him. The latter motif derives from the notion that Nature is as much involved in the moral Fall as man. Twin trees grow in the paradise garden: the tree that sustains man, that gives him life, and the tree that brings death, the agent of man's fall. The man and the earth fall under the identical curse: 'Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of

thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground; for out of it was thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.' (Genesis 3:17-19)

Of course, we are not here in the presence of a developed tradition - that was to grow and adapt itself in accordance with its own innate possibilities and with the interpretative needs of the literary artist. But the core of the myth is present, potent, and susceptible to adaptation. The biblical sources are as much the progenitors of our patterns of thinking as are the modes of Greece and Rome.

Empson, in his study of the pastoral theme in Milton, traces three traditional theories of Nature:

> There are three main ideas about Nature, putting her above, equal to, and below man. She is the work of God, or a god herself, and therefore a source of revelation; or she fits man, sympathises with him, corresponds to his social order, has magical connexions with him and so forth; or she is not morally responsible so that to contemplate her is a source of relief (this last is Cowper's main business with her, for example).

> One reason for the force of Milton's descriptions of Eden is that these contradictory ideas can be made there to work together. The apple [sic*] is a fearful source of revelation. That Nature was magically altered by the fall was part of the tradition that Milton accepted, so we willingly allow her to foresee it and groan as it occurs. (20)

This ambivalence of attitude surely springs from the unsure eye with which man surveys his environment. It has power to terrify and destroy with its lightnings and floods, and it has power to assuage his uneasy soul with its (sometime) aspect of beauty and peace, a dichotomy recognized in the biblical curse and in the divine sense of satisfaction with the created world - 'God saw everything that he had made, and, behold it was very good.' (Genesis 1:31) The twin concepts are to occur, frequently side-by-side, as we shall see, in those works of literature whose frame of action and reference is the land itself.

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* Properly speaking the 'apple' is a later imposition of the artist: the allegory of Genesis speaks only of 'the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.'

(20) William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral, p.152, Penguin (Peregrine Books), U.K., 1966.

Man's urge to master his environment likewise receives antiquity's acknowledgement, and even divine approval: man must, according to the Genesis injunction, multiply and fill the earth, but he must also 'subdue it', and ' have dominion' over it. (Genesis 1:28)

My purpose here is to establish precisely the existence of the rural paradise notion, to see its beginnings and to see the significance of its juxtaposition to the city, which is at once the assertion of man's independence of Nature and the symbol of his corruption.

The towers (ziggurats) of the city-dwellers in the Mesopotamian plains were artificial hills, raised nostalgically by migratory mountain folk become plainsmen; but they were also, according to the Genesis tradition, a proud assertion of human triumph over Nature and independence from the Creator. Haunted by fears of the inter-river

inundations, man seeks to establish his secure independence by raising towers that shall out-top the floods. 'And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for morter. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; ... and the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.' (Genesis 11:4-5)

Saint Augustine of Hippo was later, in his De Civitate Dei, to develop the notion of the Holy City of Jerusalem as the enduring substance that lay behind worldly efforts of man to create his city. It was a rejection of the underlying assumptions implicit in the urban and imperial growth.

The biblical ideal is basically anti-city, as befits a race sprung from agricultural and pastoral beginnings,

and for whom the loss of simplicity is a loss of innocence. When Jacob approaches his blind and dying father to steal the old man's blessing, he takes care to make the deception convincing by faking the signs of a man close to the earth: 'See', cries the old man, 'the smell of my son is as the smell of the fields which the lord hath blessed.' (Genesis 27:27)

Always, it would seem, man is pursued by the nagging doubt as to his own integrity while he lives insulated against the earth forces in his artificially contrived environment. It is an environment which he cleaves to, and yet longs to escape from. The ideal world becomes an Arcadia, the ideal man a shepherd or a goatherd. Clearly, the pastoral paradise is an ideal that would fain be realised:

> The landscape of classical Arcadia associated with the Golden Age as early as Vergil coalesced with Eden

> to shape from traditional materials a new whole incandescent with mystery: the Christian landscape of Renaissance pastoral. By no means all pastoral, of course, admits such specialised and oblique resonances; yet the tradition was sufficiently felt to allow writers like Spenser, Shakespeare, and Marvell to bend the genre to their distinctive literary aims. The green world could become a microcosm of the world as it should be or had been before the Fall: within such a charmed circle divine Nature had no need of human art, for there the provisional basis of the universe was to be exhibited in its essential clarity, undimmed by the realities of the Black Plague or a London Fire. (21)

Again, behind the developed pastoral idea lies the seminal Hebrew pastoral experience transmuted into the sublime religious musings of the Psalms of David the Shepherd, of which the Twenty-third Psalm is the exemplar. The national restoration of Israel is seen by deutero-Isaiah in terms of the idyll, a piece of pastoral whose importance for later pastoral can scarcely by over-valued:

> The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie dowh with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (Isaiah 11:6-7)

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(21) E.Q.Taylor, Nature and Art in Renaissance Literature, pp. 172-173, Columbia University Press, 1964.

This, of course, is a pastoral vision projected into the future. The legend of the loss of Eden gave birth to fervent hopes for the establishment of the future millennial paradise on earth, the thousand-year rule of the Shepherd-Messiah of apocalyptic hope. Impatient at the delay, men turned to political utopianism and latter-day socialist dreams, which often involved elements of the pastoral vision - free love, for instance. The bankruptcy of this movement, now, I think, evident, is the essence of the modern dilemma. Carl Jung, the psychologist, voices the problem:

> I realize only too well that I am losing faith in the possibility of a rational organization of the world; that old dream of the millennium, in which peace and harmony should rule, has grown pale. The modern man's scepticism regarding such matters has chilled his enthusiasm for politics and world-reform: more than that, it does not favour any smooth application of psychic energies to the outer world. (22)

Karl Mannheim also speaks of the 'annihilation' of the

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(22) Carl Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p.246, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1966.

utopian element in politics (Ideology and Utopia, p.225, see footnote)and his preface writer, elaborating on the point, speaks of the undermining of the supposedly firm foundations of knowledge that calls in question 'the very possibility of an intellectual life.' (23)

But I am digressing from my main theme.

That Nature is superior to Art is an article of faith that is already explicit in the sixteenth-century Spanish neo-platonist poets, whose theme is menosprecio de corte y alabanza de la vida elemental y de la edad dorada - scorn for the life of the court and praise of the simple life and the golden age. Las Soledades (Solitudes) of Luís de Góngora present, according to one interpretation, the vision of a corrupt world of man that compares ill with the super-vital and eternally-renewed world of Nature, a world

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(23) Ideology and Utopia, pp.xxvi-xxvii, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1966.

that must ultimately triumph over the efforts of man to invade it:

> Aquellas que los árboles apenas
> dejan ser torres hoy - dijo el cabrero
> con muestras de dolor extraordinarias -
> las estrellas nocturnas luminarias
> eran de sus almenas,
> cuando él que ves sayal fue limpio acero.
> Yacen ahora, y sus desnudas piedras
> visten piadosas yedras:
> que a ruinas y a estragos
> sabe el tiempo hacer verdes halagos.
>
> (Soledad Primera, 212-221)

'Those towers, today almost hidden by trees, were in other times so high that the stars of heaven seemed like lights along the battlements. That was in a time when I, instead of wearing these coarse shepherd clothes, bore the arms of a warrior. Now, the towers lie in ruins, and the sacred ivy covers their naked stones; for time, knowing how to alleviate sorrow, covers the ruins with verdant growth.' (24)

One feels that Góngora would have relished the modern discovery of the cities throttled by the bush - the Maya cities, Angkor Thom in Cambodia, and the cities buried

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(24) Trans. of Dámaso Alonso's Spanish prose rendering of the Góngora stanza in Las Soledades, third edition, Soc.de Estudios y Publicaciones, Madrid, 1956.

by the shifting sands in the arid zones, for it would again establish his thesis of the superiority of Nature to the works of man.

Vianna Moog, in a modern note on the same theme, commenting on the efforts of the American journalist Edmonds to trace the lost tracks of Confederate fugitives from the American South after the Civil War, would-be pioneers in Brazil, observes:

> Little did the journalist know what the Amazon jungle does to marks of civilization. If he had seen formerly flourishing places like Borba, Barcelos, or Humanita, which preserve hardly any trace, any vestige any sign of their past opulence or even of the presence of human communities, certainly he would not ask for signs of the old Confederate South or seek out the cemeteries where his compatriots had been buried. There on the crest of the ravines through which he wandered not even a Schliemann, he who excavated the ruins of Troy, could have located the houses or the tombs of the departed, for in those wastelands where man is buried the tentacled forest ends by entirely recapturing its former domain. The jungle respects nothing. Of the old churches and dwellings not one stone is left upon another, for the ant, that great collaborator with the

jungle, takes it upon herself to pulverize all ruins. (25)

The romantic apotheosis of the pastoral idea was, perhaps, reached in Wordsworth and the English romantics, for whom the natural world was holy, and mystical union with it a consummation devoutly to be wished, ivy-covered towers and all.

The distinguished palaeontologist and philosopher, Teilhard de Chardin, looking at the human phenomenon from the point of view of evolution, carries the whole neo-platonic pastoral notion a stage further, to see an organic unity of man and the earth from which he has sprung, and hence to establish a tellus metaphysic: man is, as it were, but the top layer, the nousphere, of a whole phenomenon of Nature that is essentially one:

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(25) Bandeirantes and Pioneers, p.41, George Brazailler, N.Y., 1964.

> For a mind that has awakened to the full meaning of evolution, mere inexplicable similitude is resolved in identity - the identity of a structure which, under different forms, extends from the bottom to the top, from threshold to threshold, from the roots to the flowers - by the organic continuity of movement, or, which amounts to the same thing, by the organic unity of milieu. (26)

It is not such a big step from this back to the neo-platonist universe, and it is not, I think, out of place in this context to consider the seminal significance of neo-platonist ideas for the pastoral theme of literature. (It is interesting, too, to note that it is Chardin, a man nurtured in the catholic, and therefore frequently neo-platonic, tradition who is the first to attempt a philosophical reconciliation between Christianity and modern evolutionary thought, and it is the biologist, Julian Huxley, who sufficiently grasps the importance of Chardin's book to contribute its preface.)

The neo-platonists believed in an underlying harmony between the visible and the invisible worlds, between matter

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(26) Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man, p.245, Collins, Fontana Books, London, 1966.

and 'soul'. Certainly, in man's case, there was a moral dissonance, but by so applying himself man could put himself in harmony with the real world, of which the visible world was but a distorted shadow. Again, the city, the product of man, was seen as the veritable expression of that dissonance. (Plotinus, the founder of neo-platonism, wanted to found a new city, purged of human corruption, to be called Platonopolis, embodying the principles of Plato's ideal republic, one of the earliest attempts to define utopia.)

To the neo-platonists may be traced the massive growth of the early Christian ascetic movement, which saw men leaving the cities to dwell in the deserts and wildernesses to become hermits to escape persecution and, later, in reaction to the moral laxity and licence of city life. Saint Jerome, one of the Fathers of the Church, passed five years as a hermit in the desert of Syria. 'His life while in the desert was one of rigorous penance, of tears and

groans alternating with spiritual ecstasy, and of temptations from haunting memories of Roman life.' (27)

Saint Augustine, whose influence on Christian, and therefore European, thought was so decisive, was himself a neo-platonist; and it was an Augustinian monk of the sixteenth century who gave neo-platonist teaching one of its finest and most delicate expressions in an age that was itself a golden age for poetry - Fray Luís de León, of Spain:

Vida Retirada	Sylvan Retreat
¡Que descansada vida la del que huye el mundanal ruido y sigue la escondida senda por donde han ido los pocos sabios que en el mundo han sido!	What rest and peace await the man who flees the noisy world, to tread the hidden track that wise men of the past have travelled by!
Que no le enturbia el pecho de los sabios grandes el estado, ni del dorado techo se admira, fabricado del sabio moro, en jaspes sustentado.	His heart remains un- troubled by the fine state of grandees, nor can the guilded ceilings of the clever moor, with jaspers studded, provoke his envious gaze.

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(27) Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1946.

No cura si la fama
canta con voz su nombre
pregonera,
ni cura si encarama
la lengua lisonjera
lo que condena la verdad sincera.

Qué presta a mí contento,
si soy del vano dedo señalado,
si en busca de este viento
ando desalentado
con ansias vivas, con mortal
cuidado?

!Oh monte, oh fuente, oh
río!
!Oh secreto seguro deleitoso!
Roto casi el navio
a vuestro almo reposo,
huyo de aqueste mar tempestuoso.

Un no rompido sueño,
un día puro, alegre, libre quiero;
no quiero ver el ceno
vanamente severo
de quien la sangre ensalza o el
dinero.

Despértenme las aves
con su canto sabroso no aprendido,
no los cuidados graves
de que es siempre seguido
elque al ajeno arbitrio está atenido.

Vivir quiero conmigo,
gozar quiero del bien que debo
al cielo
a solas, sin testigo,
libre de amor, de celo,
de odio, de esperanza, de recelo.

There is no healing for
his soul
in vulgar, mundial applause,
nor in the wagging
of the flattering tongue
that mutes the word of
truth.

How can I rest content
with being pointed out by
all, when such reward
leaves me disheartened,
unfulfilled, oppressed with
cares that chill the soul?

Oh forests, springs and
rivers!
Secure refuge of the tor-
tured soul!
Like a ship-wrecked mariner
I flee to you for rest
from the tempestuous sea.

A dream unbroken!
A day of pure delight and
liberty!
I hate to see the lowering
brow
of him raised high by birth
or monied opulence.

Let me be awakened by the
birds and their sweet un-
learned song, not by the
weighty cares that daily do
attend the man of factious
argument.

To live apart!
To enjoy the good things
heaven bestows!
Alone, away from prying
eyes!
Free from passion, jealousy,
Hatred, ambition, and
mistrust.

.....

Y mientras miserablemente se están los otros abrasando
con sed insaciable
del no durable mando,
tendido yo a la sombra esté
cantando.

A la sombra tendido,
de hiedra y lauro eterno coronado,
puesto el atento oído
al son dulce, acordado,
del plectro sabiamente meneado.

And whilst others burn
with thirst unquenchable
for power in a world that
vanishes,
my soul beneath the trees
shall overflow in song.

At peace below their
shade,
with ivy leaf and laurel
crowned,
I'll tune my ear to that
sweet sound,
to those eternal notes
of Nature's harmony.

All the familiar themes are present: the discontent with the bricks and mortar world; the distaste for the moral corruption that goes with the city; the longing to escape; the apprehension of an apparently unspoilt world of nature; the sense of ineffable contentment that union with the natural world bestows. The natural world is conceived of as pure and good. Wordsworth returned to it in his later life, deeply disillusioned with the debacle of the utopian dream that had inspired the French Revolution. For him, healing of mind awaits in the contemplation of and mystical union with Nature. Speaking of Nature's 'beauteous forms', he says

in Tintern Abbey:

> mid the din
> Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
> With tranquil restoration.

Nature, it is true, has the power to heal, but that power to heal the mind is in part due, not only to the visual impact upon the eye's retina of an object of beauty, but to a deeper spiritual vision which it provokes:

> and I have felt
> a presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

Nature is shot through with the divine for the perceiving mind. For Coleridge, the nightmare of the mariner is occasioned by his breaking the bond with the forces of the

natural world: his salvation comes when that union can be restored, and the former nightmare is turned into a marvellous delight.*

Something of the same notion of the religious signicance of Nature impelled Thoreau into his experiment in simple living on the shore of Walden Pond, isolated (almost) from his fellow men, and supporting himself entirely from such food as Nature and his own ingenuity provided.

The enthusiasm is a mystically religious one; it is an enthusiasm that has always in fact presented the orthodox Church with a serious rival. The danger was that this 'naturalism' should become an authority in its own right, displacing the established sacramentalism of the Church with

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* In Poe, too, we see unrelieved an attitude to Nature that belongs more to the tradition of the curse. He speaks somewhere in his verse of the horror that the natural realm inspires in him. Why, when for others, all the sky was blue, was it as a demon in his view?

the sacredness of Nature - Nature itself is in danger of becoming God. Commenting on this danger, Bertrand Russell has observed:

> The greek view, that creation out of nothing is impossible, has recurred at intervals in Christian times, and has led to pantheism. Pantheism holds that God and the world are not distinct, and that everything in the world is part of God. This view is developed most fully in Spinoza, but is one to which almost all mystics are attracted. It has thus happened, through the Christian centuries, that mystics have had difficulty in remaining orthodox, since they find it hard to believe that the world is outside God. (28)

Hence, those closest to Nature were closer to what really mattered, closer to the source of their being. As one casts one's eye over the literary production of western man over the centuries, one cannot but be struck by the constant recrudescence, the constant resurgence of this theme: it is perennially renewed. This tendency to treat country people as more natural persists today, and has even found expression in sociological theory:

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(28) History of Western Philosophy, p.373, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1948.

> American sociology, up to the time of World War II, was engaged in an indirect idealisation of the American family farm and small, semi-rural American community. For many American sociologists the problem confronting modern man was how to regain a rural paradise lost. Sociological studies took the form of elaborate comparisons between rural and urban modes of living. The rural mode, somehow, more often appeared as the better way of life. (29)

Mahatma Gandhi attempted to elevate the ideals of the simple life into a social philosophy for India, in a vain attempt to protect it from the technology of the West. The simple village community was India: its destruction would mean the end of all that had hitherto characterised India - its mystico-religious foundations were threatened by the incursive technological materialism.

> I don't believe (the Mahatma said) that industrialisation is necessary in any case for any country. It is much less so for India. Indeed I believe that independent India can only discharge her duty toward a groaning world by adopting a simple butennobled life by developing her thousands of cottages and living at peace with the world. High thinking is inconsistent with a complicated material life. (30)

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(29) R.P. Cuzzort, Humanity and Modern Sociological Thought, p.72, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, N.Y., 1969.

(30) Cited by UNESCO publication All Men are Brothers, 1958, and quoted by D.G. Tendulkar's Life of Mohandas Gandhi.

The modern literary expression of the pastoral theme, with its social implications, is most marked in the novels of D.H. Lawrence, where the 'back to Nature' cult is again an essential element in the novelist's literary dynamics: man must rediscover himself by breaking free of the artificialities and conventions of city living. His hero is a man close to Nature, a game-keeper, who has deliberately turned his back on the city (Lady Chatterley's Lover); his 'villain' a physically crippled industrialist, sexually impotent. Lawrence is as avid a portrayer of the baleful effects of industrialism (a kind of terminus ad quem of civilisation) on the soul of man as the poet William Blake. Lawrence is even more to the point in his poem Snake. There are, according to him, two forces at work in him - the 'natural' and the 'acquired'. The natural, at the instinctive level, gives him a sense of belonging to the natural realm; the acquired establishes his sense of alienation, of apartness from Nature. His first impulse, the natural and right one,

he contends, upon finding a snake at his water hole, is to a sense of wonder and pleasure. The second, the voice of his 'accursed human education', impels him to destroy the snake, and indeed he attempts to do so. The act leaves him (as a similar act left Coleridge's mariner) with a sense of sin. The theme is explicit also in the poetry of Hopkins (and, in fact, in many other poets) for whom the shoe symbolizes man's separation from the land, and therefore from the ultimate ground of his being:

> And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
> And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell; the soil
> is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod. (31)

These writers are heirs to a perennial tradition, the characteristic voices of a persistent conviction. Schweitzer gave theological expression to it in his doctrine of 'reverence for life' (inspired by his readings in eastern religions?). He would not so much as kill a fly, unless the

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(31) Gerard Manley Hopkins, God's Grandeur.

greater imperative of saving human life were invoked. And Saint Francis of Assisi, in the words of Lynn White, in her book, The Subversive Science, tried to substitute 'the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man's limitless rule of creation.'

Unquestionably the angst, inspired by man's mental evolution and consequent alienation from the world that produced him, is deeply and anciently felt, and one discovers ramifications in whatever direction one cares to look, whether it be history, mythology, sociology, literature, painting, or whatever. Our very earliest cults were Nature cults. Our religions, literature and civilization flow back to these grass roots beginnings and are profoundly an expression of them.

Frazer's monumental work on magic and religion, limited though it is from the anthropologist's point of view by the author's lack of direct contact with the customs he

examines, is nevertheless pertinent throughout to the theme here pursued. The psychic roots of modern Nature movements are to be found in a world once overwhelmed by the massive presence of the continental flora. Only the relatively modern growth of empires that could harness the cooperative energies of their societies began the process of putting the natural world to flight. Until then, the environmental flora was the object of religious awe and worship, and indeed remained so for some considerable time subsequently. The soaring gothic arches of our mediaeval cathedrals are the vaulting branches of bosky temples congealed in stone. Frazer's notes of Nature's place in the mind of ancient man is worth quoting extensively:

> In the religious history of the Aryan race in Europe the worship of trees has played an important part. Nothing could be more natural. For at the dawn of history Europe was covered with immense primaeval forests, in which the scattered clearings must have appeared like islets in an ocean of green. Down to the first century before our era the Hercynian forest stretched eastward from the Rhine for a distance at once vast and unknown; Germans whom Caesar questioned had travelled for two months through it without reaching the end. Four

centuries later it was visited by the Emperor Julian and the solitude, the gloom, the silence of the forest appear to have made a deep impression on his sensitive nature. He declared that he knew nothing like it in the Roman empire. In our own country the wealds of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex are remnants of the great forest of Anderida, which once clothed the whole of the south-eastern portion of the island. Westward it seems to have stretched till it joined another forest that extended from Hampshire to Devon. In the reign of Henry II the citizens of London still hunted the wild bull and boar in the woods of Hampstead. Even under the later Plantagenets the royal forests were sixty-eight in number. In the forests of Arden it was said that down to modern times a squirrel might leap from tree to tree for nearly the whole length of Warwickshire. The excavation of ancient pile-villages in the valley of the Po has shown that long before the rise and probably the foundation of Rome the north of Italy was covered with dense woods of elms, chestnuts, and especially of oaks. Archaeology is here confirmed by history; for classical writers contain many references to Italian forests which have now disappeared. As late as the fourth century before our era Rome was divided from central Etruria by the dreaded Ciminian forest, which Livy compares to the woods of Germany. No Merchant, if we may trust the Roman historian, had ever penetrated its pathless solitudes: and it was deemed a most daring feat when a Roman general, after sending two scouts to explore its intricacies, led his army into the forest and, making his way to a ridge of the wooded mountains, looked down on the rich Etrurian fields spread out below. In Greece beautiful woods of pine, oak and other trees still linger on the slopes of the high Arcadian mountains, still adorn with their verdue the deep gorge through which the Ladon hurries to join the sacred Alpheus, and were still, down to a few years ago, mirrored in the dark blue waters of the lonely lake of Pheneus: but they are mere fragments of the forests which clothed great tracts in antiquity, and which at a more remote epoch may have spanned the Greek peninsula from sea to sea.

From an examination of the Teutonic words for 'temple' Grimm has made it probable that amongst the Germans the oldest sanctuaries were natural woods. However that may be, tree worship is well attested for all the great European families of the Aryan stock. Amongst the Celts the oak worship of the Druids is familiar to everyone, and their old word for sanctuary seems to be identical in origin and meaning with the Latin nemus, a grove or woodland glade, which still survives in the name of Nemi. Sacred groves were common among the ancient Germans, and tree worship is hardly extinct amongst their descendants at the present day. How serious that worship was in former times may be gathered from the ferocious penalty appointed by the old German laws for such as dared to peel the bark of a standing tree. The culprit's navel was to be cut out and nailed to the part of the tree which he had peeled, and he was to be driven round and round the tree till all his guts were wound about its trunk. The intention of the punishment clearly was to replace the dead bark by a living substitute taken from the culprit; it was a life for a life, the life of a man for the life of a tree. At Upsala, the old religious capital of Sweden, there was a sacred grove in which every tree was regarded as divine. The heathen Slavs worshipped trees and groves. The Lithuanians were not converted to Christianity till towards the close of the fourteenth century, and amongst them at the date of their conversion the worship of trees was prominent. Some of them revered remarkable oaks and other great shady trees, from which they received oracular responses. Some maintained holy groves about their villages or houses, where even to break a twig would have been a sin. They thought that he who cut a bough in such a grove either died suddenly or was crippled in one of his limbs. Proofs of the prevalence of tree worship in ancient Greece and Italy are abundant. In the sanctuary of Aesulapius at Cos, for example, it was forbidden to cut down the cypress trees under a penalty of a thousand drachmas. But nowhere, perhaps, in the ancient world was this antique form of religion better preserved than in the heart of the great metropolis itself. In the Forum, the busy centre of Roman life, the sacred fig tree of Romulus was worshipped down to the days of the empire, and the withering of its trunk was enough to spread consternation through the city.

> Again, on the slopes of the Palatine Hill grew a cornel tree which was esteemed one of the most sacred objects in Rome. Whenever the tree appeared to a passer-by to be drooping, he set up a hue and cry which was echoed by the people in the street, and soon a crowd might be seen running helter-skelter from all sides with buckets of water, as if (says Plutarch) they were hastening to put out a fire. (32).

I have quoted Frazer at length to establish the intimacy of the connection between early European man and his environment, and of his reluctance to violate it. It was, indeed, for the great earth-mother, the life-giver and nourisher, that ancient man reserved his greatest respect and to whom his close attachment was a daily fact of his life.

A similar sense of the mystical, numinous quality of the great forests finds its expression in Jaime Mendoza's Páginas Bárbaras, which perfectly reflects the modern form of the ancient mind in the face of the still surviving equatorial forests:

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(32) Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp. 109-111, Macmillan, London, 1923.

El árbol! He aquí lo que caracteriza y reune esa tierra. El es su vida, su gesto, su belleza. El vence al trigo; es el alcázar de las aves, es la envidia de la pampa y el rival de la montaña; es casa, es abrigo, es alimento, es templo, es lecho, es dosel. Es también arpa gigantesca. Todo lo es allí el árbol: la fuerza, la alegría, el esplendor, el poder...Un gran rey. Pero también "hay tantos árboles". Rebaños de reyes. Aquel verdor fastuoso aturde, emborracha. Uno se siente aplastado bajo aquellas bóvedas flotantes y entre aquel mar de pilares - curioso arquetectura - que se mueve y cruje y suspira y canta. Es un laberinto inextricable de donde, a poco que se pierda el rumbo, no se vuelve a salir. Se está como en medio de un océano de hojas. Se está como en una orgía fenomenal, una danza loca de troncos y de ramas, abrazados, apiñados, superpuestos, que le interceptan a uno el paso por delante, por los dos lados por atrás, llevando la mente al vértigo y aun al terror. El árbol se vuelve aborrecible. Lo mismo que es una protección, se vuelve una tiranía...extendiéndose dentro de Bolivia, por más de un millón de kilómetros cuadrados.

The tree! This is what characterises and epitomises this land. It is its life, its expression, its beauty. It towers over the corn; it is the secure stronghold of the birds, the envy of the plains and the rival of the mountains; it is home, covering, food, temple, bed and dais. It is also a gigantic harp. The tree is everything: it is strength, joy, splendour and power ... a great king. But also 'there are so many trees'. Flocks of kings. That haughty greenery bewilders one, makes one drunk. One feels crushed under those floating vaults and amidst that sea of pillars - strange architecture - that moves and creaks and sighs and sings. It is an inextricable labyrinth where one is straightway lost and unable to emerge again. It is like being in an ocean of leaves, or in a phenomenally mad orgy of dancing trunks and boughs that embrace, press you together and overwhelm you, that trip you up before, behind and on both sides, making the mind giddy and terror stricken. The tree becomes hateful. Just as it gives protection, so it imposes a tyranny ... extending into the Bolivian hinterland over more than a million square kilometres.

Pursuent to the theme of man and Nature, Tindell observes:

> It has been suggested that in the dawn of human life, when intellect began to replace instinct, man became fearful of his developing separation from Nature; and that all his early magic cults - sacrifices to trees, animal totems etc. - were an attempt to remain 'in touch'; either by imitating animals (e.g. wearing masks), or by exalting animals and plants to superhuman status and endowing them with spirits. Women, being dominated by the mysterious rhythms of menstruation and childbearing were felt to be more closely identified with Nature than men were, and therefore cults were matriarchal ones .. (33)

If Hopkins can see the shoe as separating men from the holy earth, the shedding of the artifice of clothing was no less important to ancient man:

> The witches, for instance, often performed their rites and spells naked - there is a charming fifteenth century picture of a Flemish witch preparing a philtre: she stands naked with herbs at her feet, and is young and pretty, with that slightly pregnant looking stomach that so many medieval and renaissance women have in pictures. Nakedness was not, to the pagan world, indicative of anything but a state of closeness to nature (e.g. a well-known fertility charm for crops was to harness a naked women to the plough (34)

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(33) G. Tindall, A Handbook on Witches, p.29, Panther Books U.K. 1966.

(34) ibid. p.49.

The modern legacy of all this is the concomitant theme of the 'noble savage', uncorrupted by civilised life, living an idyllic life in close contact and harmony with the natural world, a fanciful notion of a European world increasingly victim to the technology and mechanization of the new age. And although Rousseauesque and naïve nineteenth century fancies of the noble savage myth have long since been banished by closer acquaintance with the true conditions of his life, yet the idealisation of the indigene remains a notable feature of the literature of North and South America and of Australia, in which the civilised conqueror frequently shows up badly in comparison with the people he displaces. Already in the sixteenth century in Spanish America the friar Bartolomé de las Casas was idealising the innocence of the American aborigines and thus gave currency to the charge that Spanish imperialism was basically cruel, bigoted and exploitive. 'His humanitarian zeal in the cause of the American Indian helped to

establish the cult of the noble savage which was to form an important element in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.' (35)

The philosophers of the Enlightenment would have agreed with the charge, for, resentful of the Christian imposition in history, and fascinated with the notion of the underlying harmony of nature (under the influence of the mechanistic interpretation of the universe encouraged by Newtonian physics), they also had recourse to the elevation of the primitive life that ante-dated Christianity.*

The state of angst that has characterised civilised men through the ages, and which has given birth to the sense

(35) D.M. Dozer, Latin America: An Interpretative History, pp. 129-30, McGraw-Hill, N.Y., 1962.

* They, however, denied the biblical Fall, and looked to posterity for a new liberal society, freed of religious shackles and perfecting itself through its own rational efforts, thus exorcising, as Carl Becker says, 'the double illusion of the Christian paradise and the golden age of antiquity.' (The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers, p.130, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1968.)

of a paradise lost, to the longing to get back to what is natural and real, should not be dismissed as the quaint vagaries of the romantic. The urban menace is all too real as more and more of the earth's open spaces are swallowed up by ever-expanding cities to cope with a rapidly multiplying human population. Concern is everywhere expressed by spokesmen of the modern conservationist movements: the open spaces and the flora and fauna of the earth face a genuine crisis of survival, as in fact does man himself. Men everywhere feel their integrity to be threatened. Wolf Schneider states the situation graphically in his Babylon is Everywhere:

> The city is the world that man builds for himself, and it is a weird fact, of incalculable consequence, that this man-made world is on the verge of destroying the nature of this earth.
>
> A century ago there were five metropolitan cities in Germany. Today there are fifty-three in the West German Republic alone. The industrial city of Angarsk in Siberia, today has 140,000 inhabitants; not a single house was visible there in 1850. The gold-mining village of Johannesburg, in South Africa, was

founded in 1886; today, 1.3 million people are living there a hundred years ago only five cities on this globe had passed the million mark; today 115 cities or more than a million inhabitants are spread over all the Western world. Who, for example, has ever heard much about Paotow-chen, a city of over a million in China?

Although these disquieting figures are taken from official statistics, the urbanization of the earth has progressed much further than officialdom has let us know. For most cities have already burst their boundaries. In some sources Paris is still listed as having 2.9 million. New York, with its surrounding area, is approaching its sixteenth million; Tokio has surpassed its twentieth.

Two hundred years hence, should mankind continue increasing at the rate it has during the last decade, the earth might well grow into a single endless city of a hundred thousand million residents. It may never come to that, but even twenty-thousand million people will find room only if most of them squeeze into giant cities. This frightening development has become obvious only during the past hundred years or so, that is to say, during the last minute of history, if, for the sake of illustration, we equate the whole of city history with one hour. When Rome was founded 2,700 years ago, more than half the hour had already passed.

The first settlements that may be called cities developed about 7,000 years ago along the river Euphrates what is today Iraq, and in other places of Asia Minor. Having been a roaming, rapacious animal for 600,000 years, man now began, in some of the fertile river valleys between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, to till the soil and to congregate in cities. With this revolutionary development history and culture begin. (36)

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(36) Wolf Schneider, Babylon is Everywhere, p.17, Hodder & Stoughton, U.K., 1963, trans. from the German by I. Sammet and J. Oldenburg.

There is a widespread realization that man's mental health is to a significant extent dependent on his not feeling enclosed or imprisoned, or overcrowded, on his being able to 'get away from it all', of being able to ascape from the tensions of the city to the fresh and unspoilt open spaces of the earth. It is everywhere acknowledged that the highly concentrated urban environment tends to generate a sense of disquiet, of unease, that is held to be responsible for the very high incidence of neuroses in the cities. The Vance Packard studies have clearly shown the kind of stresses to which modern urban man is subject if he is to survive in the highly competitive environment that western man has developed.

Other signs of the malaise are to be observed in the spirit of rebellion against the values our society has succeeded is developing, which, it is felt, lead to a de-humanising of man. No doubt youth has always rebelled, but it is incontestably so that one of the strongest forms

that the present revolt takes is that of a turning away from the city to an espousal of long hair, music, love and the countryside, and a rejection of the city and its institutional life. The Woodstock gathering in 1969 in the United States was, perhaps, the most remarkable example of the trend: a million people turned their backs on the multi-million strong New York city, and other centres, and trekked ninety miles up to the area of the Catskill Mountains, to slopes covered by trees, woodland plants and flowers, in an attempt to realise a dream of music and togetherness away from the inhibiting atmosphere of the cities. Now whatever view we may take of this, of its causes, or of its desirability, it must be allowed that as a social phenomenon it was truly remarkable. The desire to contract out of the kind of world that is ours today is, no doubt, an impossible dream, doomed from the start; but it represents a disillusionment with the world that science has succeeded in creating, and must, I am convinced, be seen within the wider context of man's progressive alienation from the soil.

City planners attempt to reduce this urban tension by creating garden cities, or by providing cities with sylvan retreats in their parks and public gardens. Fear of despoliation and the disappearance of the natural world (now that the conquest of it is virtually complete), of the fundamental disruption of the ecological balance, is one of modern man's problems and phobias. Man senses a violence to himself, a disruption that cuts him off from his origins.

There seems, therefore, to be something real in man's experience that corresponds to the fascination with the rural idea that we find in the works of literature. Professor Howard Thurman even goes so far as to see the collective human psyche suffering from the trauma inflicted by increasing alienation from the wholesome environment, with disastrous social consequences:

> I am convinced that the phenomenal increase in mental and emotional disturbance in every country is not merely due to the pressures of modern life. It is

> due to man's response to the disintegration of the environment. Man is a child of nature, so he belongs to its rhythm. When I denude the hills, pollute the atmosphere and poison the streams, the deep psyche of man is not only degenerated but outraged. (37)

Robert Ardley argues much the same thesis in his provocative book The Territorial Imperative: a Personal Inquiry into the Animal Origins of Property and Nations:

> That man's territorial nature is inherent and of evolutionary origin is scarcely a new thought; it is merely an ignored one. It has been pressed aside by our political antipathies, by our social preoccupations, by our romantic fallacies concerning the uniqueness of man, by our contemporary dedication to the myth that man is without instinct and a creature solely of his culture. Yet it would seem to be a thought which we may ignore no longer. As our populations expand, as a world-wide movement from countryside to city embraces all peoples, as problems of housing, of broken homes and juvenile delinquency, of mass education and delayed independence of the young rise about us in our every human midst, as David Riesman's phrase 'the lonely crowd' comes more and more aptly to describe all mankind, have we not the right to ask: Is what we are witnessing, in essence, not the first consequence of the deterritorialising of man? And if man is a territorial animal, then as we seek to repair his dignity and responsibility as a human being, should we not first search for means of restoring his dignity and responsibility as a proprietor? (38)

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(37) Howard Thurman, emeritus professor of theology at Howard University, Washington, in an interview published in The Australian, Sydney, 31.1.70.

(38) pp. 117-118, Collins (Fontana), London, 1969.

Industrial and colonial man have proved equally destructive; it is indeed with the latter especially that the modern ecological problem begins. North America is one case that may be cited, but much the same holds good of other continents, too, Australia included:

> For a short three hundred years the white man has inhabited this continent. His attitude towards its riches has been vastly different from that of the Indian. Instead of living and working with nature, he has set out to 'tame' her. In the process he has cut down many of the once immense forests. Fully one third of these are gone for ever. In the West he has ploughed under the long grasses and sown that acreage to crops. River after river of once sparkling water now runs dark and muddy, polluted with the wastes of factories and the soil of eroding farmlands. The thundering herds of buffalo are gone. In their place are cattle. The bison were constantly on the move, never overgrazing their feedinggrounds. The cattle are fenced in, and millions of Western acres are now overgrazed and may soon become eroded. And in some places, because of human greed, the land has actually disappeared, and not in our lifetime will it again grow a shady forest or give shelter to a flock of birds or a home to a family of deer. (39)

The physical expansion of Europe, possible as a result of its voyages of discovery and made necessary through the new socio-economic patterns that emerged as a

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(39) Hitch and Sorenson, Conservation and You, p.7, Van Nostrand, N.Y., 1964.

direct consequence of the increasingly city-centred industrial life, has been unique in the history of mankind. The man of the city, the civilised man, poured in his thousands from his native shores into the wild and rugged areas of the earth to face a struggle that was epic in its proportions. It was inspired by the need to escape, and in response to the cry 'Give place to me that I might dwell', and was undertaken in a spirit of high optimism and utopianism that discerned the prospect of a more natural and satisfying life.

Vincent Buckley, arguing his thesis that the enduring twin influences in Australian literature are 'utopian humanism' and 'vitalism', notes that the earlier crude 'prophetic' social utopianism, invalidated by history, gave way to an inverted 'lyrical utopianism', with its insistence on the self contained, abiding life that can be lived by communities in touch with the earth. (40) It may be added that this recourse, made necessary by the progressive

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(40) Utopianism and Vitalism, Quadrant, Autumn, Sydney, 1959.

disillusionment created by the developing social scene, was no less necessary a recourse to pastoral-utopian writers of the European past. Australian novelists (and poets) are thus in this respect firmly in line with an ancient literary tendency. The frontiers experience (temporarily, at any rate) revitalised utopian-arcadian dreams with the promise of actual realization.

SUMMARY

In this introductory chapter I have attempted to do four things:

(i) To see the literary genre of the novel of the land as essentially the product of colonial man's encounter with virgin continents. If worth, as Robert Ardley remarks, 'is being eternally tested in the field of environment' (a concept of Evolution and Natural Selection) we should expect

to see that experience being interpreted in terms of the novel, just as the complex interactions of urban man are exhaustively examined in the European novel.

(ii) To argue that the European colonial exodus should be seen not so much in terms of national group experience as in epic terms of civilised European man as a species facing in both the South American and the Australian continents a common problem of adaptation to a world vastly different from the European continent he has left. A comparison of the two emigrant ventures, despite the initial time disparity of the respective emigrant waves, is possible in that both faced adaptation problems of a comparable nature, and in that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' experience is in both cases articulated in the form of the modern novel.

(iii) To trace the origins and earlier forms of pastoral and to identify the modern novel of the land as a late

flowering of the pastoral genre by showing its relationship and notional dependence with and upon pastoral of antiquity. To trace the related notions of the pastoral paradise, the ex-paradisiacal land of the curse, the rus versus the urbs, the Neo-Platonic vision, the nineteenth century Romantic Pantheism, and the perennial aspiration to the simple life of the land -and thus to provide the cultural reference points in the remote past necessary to an understanding of attitudes emerging in the land-centred novel of the pioneering countries of the recent past and the present.

(iv) Further, to suggest that the ancient literary preoccupation with man in relation to the earth is rooted in his evolutionary past, and that the phenomenon of pastoral as a literary form is in fact no less than urban man's lament for a way of life that is daily becoming more distant as man becomes increasingly 'deterritorialised',

and as the threat to the ecology of the earth that the 'city' poses assumes the proportions of a potential total disaster for the species homo sapiens.

Such is the background. It now remains to examine some of the literary productions of the two continents and to highlight their indebtedness to these literary, philosophical and evolutionary forebears, and to see also what they uniquely contribute to a genre that is as old as literature itself.

Chapter 2

Carlos Reyles: Rural Life as a national ideal

The first Spanish-American novel, El Periquillo Sarniento (The Mangy Parrot), by Lizardi, appeared in Mexico in 1816. It was a criticism of colonial life, and especially of that repugnance for manual labour that characterised the well-born Spaniard as being unworthy of a gentleman, and which was particularly absurd in a pioneering country.

Lizardi satirizes the breed of colonial gentleman farmer, the nouveau riche of the new world, whose money enables him to secure honours back home in Spain. His young picaresque hero looks forward, after once having made his money grow quickly in the new world, to the conferment of a title; but his 'background' must be right: El campo, sí. ?Cual otro más propio y honorífico para un Marqués que el campo? Compraré un par de haciendas de las mejores; las

surtiré de fieles e inteligentes administradores, y contando por lo regular con la fertilidad de mi patria, levantaré unas cosechas abundantísimas... (41) -'The land, certainly. What could be more suitable and honourable for a Marquis than land? I'll purchase a couple of the best properties and put in some reliable and intelligent men to run them; with these, and the natural fertility of the soil, I shall be able to count on good harvests.' It is the Spanish absentee landlord all over again. The work is done by someone else; he collects the profits without soiling his hands. Later, when Periquillo is shipwrecked on an island in the new world, Lizardi takes the opportunity of outlining his (rather pedestrian, nondescript kind of) utopia: ?Qué sabes hacer? -'What skill have you?'- the citizens ask. El caso es que aquí nadie come nuestro arroz ni la sabrosa carne de nuestras vacas y peces sin ganarlo con el trabajo de sus manos. -'The fact is that here nobody eats our rice, nor the tasty flesh of our cows and fish, unless he has first

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(41) José Joaquín Fernandez de Lizardi, El Periquillo Sarniento, p. 326, Ed. Porrua, S.A., 1961.

earned it by hard work.' The values are those of an emerging colonial society that is indignantly conscious of being exploited by drones from the home country. In Lizardi's utopia all must learn a trade; nobles must earn their nobility; doctors and theologians must be well trained; lawyers simply don't exist; the family is the base of society and there are, emphatically, no beggars: honest toil is the only entitlement to membership of the society.

The subsequent Romantic movement, a cultural importation from France, set in motion the literary forces of nativism; for Romanticism, as a phenomenon of literary expression, was inward looking, introspective, and therefore, perhaps, calculated to have such an effect upon Spanish American writers in search of an indigenous Spanish literature. The striving after cultural independence from Spain therefore was coincident with the struggle for political independence, or followed hard upon its heels.

Esteben Echeverría called upon writers to seek cultural independence as a natural consequence of political separation from Spain. So that we are not surprised to find writers seeking after what was unique to the life and experience of Spanish-America. Inevitably, an interest in the Indian and in the remote, uncivilised parts of the continent becomes an important element in the early growth of Spanish-American literature. José de Alencón, in his novel O Guarany (1857) alights upon the noble savage motif; in poetry, José Hernández, following others, does the same with his epic of gaucho life, Martín Fierro (1872).

After the First World War there was a strong rekindling of the nativist movement, and again the nature of the environment (mostly conceived of as hostile and inimical to the further extension of human sovereignty), and the idealisation of the indigene and the criollos (the colonially born Spaniard who had adopted something of the indigene's life and values), emerge as significant themes in the novel.

Ricardo Rojas, of Argentina, seeking to analyse the inner forces of the new Spanish-American (Argentinian) nationalism, asks what forces achieved the Spanish/Spanish-American metamorphosis. His answer is - the land and the indigene together exert a subtle yet decisive influence upon the criollo. The colonists who filtered into Argentina from other Latin-American countries (there was little direct immigration), were largely from Andalucia in southern Spain, whose characteristic manner of speaking they carried with them:

> El colono del Río de la Plata fue con preferencia andaluz, vale decir anárquico, moreno y sensual. No era el vasco de Chile, que cuidaba la pureza de su abolengo; ni el inglés de Virginia, que despreciaba las razas inferiores. (42)

> The River Plate colonist was largely Andalucian, anarchic therefore, dark and sensual. He was not the basque of Chile, prizing the purity of his racial origins; nor was he the Englishman of Virginia, who despised inferior races.

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(42) Ricardo Rojas, Blasón de Plata, p.84, Losada, Buenos Aires, 1954. First published in La Nación, Buenos Aires, 1910.

The Andalucian colonist, therefore, was open to new influences; he developed what Rojas calls 'a territorial feeling' (la emoción territorial), a sense of belonging profoundly to the adopted land: la conciencia de un pueblo ha de considerarse también la impregnación espiritual del suelo. (43) - 'the inner identity of a people must be considered also as deriving from the spiritual impregnation of the land.' For Rojas, racial identity is not so much a physical as a spiritual thing. Las naciones no reposan en la pureza fisiológica de las razas... sino en la emoción de la tierra y la conciencia de su unidad espiritual. (44) - 'It is not physiological purity of race that identifies a nation but the feeling for the land and an awareness of spiritual unity.' He explains this explicitly:

> Nuestra emoción ante los paisajes natales ha de ser siempre idéntica a la que turbara el alma ingenua de los indios. Nuestra pampa, nuestra montaña, nuestra selva, nuestros ríos, nuestros árboles, nuestras aves, nuestras fieras, fueron espectáculos familiares a sus ojos. (45)

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(43), (44), (45) ibid, pp.98 and 125.

The emotion we (colonial-born Spaniards) feel in the presence of the countryside of our birth must always be identical to that which stirred the simple soul of the Indians. Our plains, our mountains, our forests, our rivers, our trees, birds and wild beasts, were familiar sights to their eyes too.

Familiar, yes, and exerting the same forces of attraction for the colonial creoles as for the Indian. Creoles indeed <u>became</u> Indians by the nature of the environment or by the attraction of the native soil, which exerts a force of spiritual gravitation: la fuerza del indianismo, el influjo de las tierras americanas, está oculto y presente como un instinto colectivo. (46) - 'The indianising force, the influence of the American land, works secretly and is felt as a collective instinct.' At the conscious level, there is a willing and necessary adptation to the new life:

Las familias doctoran por lo comun al primogénito... mientras los otros hermanos conservaban o acrecentaban la heredad comun, virilizándose al mismo tiempo en la vida y en las faenas de fundo paterno. Arrieros los unos, comerciantes los otros, estancieros los más, adiestrábanse en el manejo del caballo, curtíanse a la intemperie de

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(46) ibid. p.115.

de los campos amigos, templaban su caracter en los peligros y el mando, familiarizábanse con el alma del gaucho y del indio, y en sus viajes se impregnaban con la emoción de los paisajes americanos.

Families generally gave a university education to the eldest son ... whilst the other sons saw to the care and development of the family property, at the same time toughening and developing themselves through the life and management of the rural estates of their father. Some were carriers, some businessmen; but most were ranchers who became skilful in the handling of horses and were toughened in the struggle against the inclemencies of a land they had grown to love; their character was tempered by danger and responsibility; they grew to know the soul of the gaucho, and the indian, and in their journeyings impregnated themselves with the emotion of the American countryside.

The literature of a people does not spring up ex vacuo: it emerges as an expression of the values important to a society. In this sense the novelist articulates the deeply held convictions of his audience. The evidence of his success is the responsive echo that his work provokes. As Pope, the English poet, put it

> True wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd;
> Something whose truth convinc't at sight we find,
> That gives us back the image of our mind.

It would be surprising indeed, then, if a literature pastorally inspired had not grown up in Spanish-America, where the conditions of its growth - a colonial people newly at grips with the pampa or llano - are emphatically present. The pastoral myths had to follow as surely in Spanish-America as in North America and Australia, and as in the earliest pastoral communities.

Similarly, one of the important functions of the Australian novel is the attempt to show a new people 'in touch' with a new land, or in the process of achieving that close identity: the novel here becomes almost a sociological treatise. Australia has produced no sociological philosopher of the stature of, say, Rodó, or of other semi-philosophical essayists of the Spanish-American genre until recent times. Such essayists as there were had about them the quality of the literary dilettante. Sociological enquiry into the Australian experience has been a relatively recent thing, the

product of university departments (Russell Ward, for example). But the novel led the way. Eleanor Dark and K.S. Prichard, in addition to being superb novelists, have also been penetrating commentators on the essentially pastoral roots of Australian life and values.

Of course, it is true that South America has been a politically unstable continent in a sense that Australia has never been, and that violent severence from the mother-land and the subsequent much disturbed conditions presented a special stimulus to agonized socio-philosophical inquiry. The birth of Spanish-American nationalism presented the resultant nations with a clear crisis of identity, and consequently the philosophers of the new world arose to meet the need, in much the same way that Spain, feeling the backlash of South American secessionist movements, and suffering from the shock of the Napoleonic intrusion, felt the need for a reinterpretation of Spain's role in the modern world, and generated a crop of socio-philosophers of the quality of

Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset to meet the need.

I have referred above to the crisis of identity that faced Spanish Americans following the revolt from Spain. The major problem facing the new nations was what kind of society they were to develop.

Carlos Reyles of Uruguay is in no doubt as to what should constitute the ideal type of man in the new society.

In El Terruño (Native Soil), published in 1916, he argues strongly against the breed of effete 'intellectual' that had emerged as the proper leaders of society, a creature of the city, impractical, verbose, and contrasts him with the solid worth of the uneducated but industrious man of the land, here seen as the repository of the virtues of the race.

There was, indeed, to be a strong reaction against the impractical and isolated city intellectual in Spanish

America following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. New Marxist ideas were to elevate the common man, the peasant and worker, and abase the intellectual who had not stained his hands with work. Was society to reflect the aristocratic repugnance for manual labour that had so long characterised Spain, or was it to elevate into a national ideal what was in reality a universal social need in the Americas?

The Uruguayan philosopher, José Enrique Rodó, who contributes an introduction to El Terruño, speaks approvingly in his essay Ariel, published in 1900, of

> la grandeza y el poder del trabajo; esa fuerza bendita que la antiquedad abandonaba a la abyección de la esclavitud, y que hoy identificamos con la más alta expressión de la dignidad humana, fundada en la conciencia y la actividad del propio mérito. Fuertes, tenaces, teniendo la inacción por oprobio, ellos han puesto en manos del mechanic de sus talleres y el farmer de sus campos, la clava herculea de mito. (47)

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(47) Ariel p.102, Austral, Buenos Aires, 1948.

> The greatness of the power of work; that blessed force that antiquity abandoned in favour of slavery, and which today we identify with the highest expression of human dignity, founded on conscience and merit. Strong, tenacious, holding idleness a sin, they, the North Americans, have placed into the hands of the mechanic in his workshop and the farmer in his fields the key to the herculean myth.

The worker, in fact, was to be the new ideal. We have currently seen something of the same forces at work in China. Chairman Mao's doctrine has raised the common worker and elevated peasant values at the expense of the intellectual and the theoretician. Jean Franco lists some of the notable names in the world of Spanish letters that, caught up in the revolutionary enthusiasm that the Russian Revolution inspired throughout Spanish America, turned their backs upon the cultural isolation, the lettered ivory towers of their lives, and threw themselves into practical tasks that, they hoped, would usher in the new age of justice. They identified themselves with the lives and aspirations of the peasantry in an attempt to bridge the gulf that they knew to exist between themselves as intellectuals and the masses. Thus Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet, joins

the Communist Party and takes part in the Spanish Civil War; Graciliano Ramos of Brazil speaks scathingly of his own poetry and insists on his own inferiority to other men of courageous and militant direct action; David Alfaro Siquieros, the Mexican muralist, becomes a trade union leader; Martínez Villena of Cuba positively rejects his own poetry to embrace the communal spirit expressed in the Communist Party; and Cesar Vallejo of Peru argues that the intellect is a source of evil, being a rational faculty 'at the conscious or unconscious service of one or other of the passions or interests.'

This is not to say, of course, that Carlos Reyles is to be associated with the socialist forces released by the Russian Revolution. El Terruño in fact antedates that event. But the sense of frustration with ideas qua ideas was in the air, and the intellectual tended to be an urban product cut off from the vital current of life that flowed, so it was held, from the land. The

cities were frequently looked upon as parasites living from the sweat and wealth of the interior regions.

El Terruño undoubtedly owes something to Reyles' own disappointment and disillusionment in the political field; but it owes considerably more to literary currents in Spanish America that were looking to the land and a people's relationship to it as the one factor that established the uniqueness of Spanish-Americans. Ricardo Rojas' Blasón de Plata (1909), as I have indicated, went so far as to embody the notion in a developed theory of telluric dynamism. This is the mainspring of the novel, and not a minor theme arising incidentally from the author's main interest.

Hence, we find Reyles setting the embodied ideals of rural life and action against the impotence of the abstract idea and of theoretical politics.

We first meet, in El Terruño, the practical, hard-

working Doña Ángela (Mamagela) who runs the outback pulpería (a cross between a pub and an outback trade store), El Ombú, with commendable efficiency. She belongs to that breed of woman that, in an Australian setting, we encounter in K.S.Prichard's Mrs. Bessie: an outback phenomenon combining the female and male virtues, dogged, capable and indomitable. She has initiated and built up a good flock of merinos. She is a perfect example of pioneer womanhood.

Mamagela, however, although strongly and convincingly drawn - a fine triumph of characterisation - functions in the novel as the mouthpiece of the author's ideas. She submits us to a constant bombardment of her opinions that are, nevertheless, never at odds with her character. She, like many practical countrymen, is impatient with all that is represented by her schoolteacher daughter and her university-man son-in-law. She preaches the virtues of hard work and practical application to the tasks to be done. La pereza nacional es levantarse a las doce de la mañana y

luego bostezar todo el día sobre los libros ... El hombre no nació para leer, sino para trabajar, - 'The national idleness is to get up at midday and yawn over books ...a man is born to work,not to read.' Mamagela's life is one long tirade against the sloppy, lazy and immoral life represented by the city, and praise for the virtues of the simple life of the country, with its pattern of diligent application to the necessary daily routine of life.

When Amabí, her daughter, spending a holiday with her mother, walks through the placid country scene, breathes deep of the fresh air, and remarks on how happy she feels, Mamagela seizes upon her words to drive home the point: Es porque vuelves a la vida natural, 'It is because you have returned to a natural life'.

What we have, in fact, is the immemorial country suspicion of the smart alecs of the city who seem to contribute so little and yet enjoy a disproportionate sense of

superiority. Mamagela will have nothing of politicians, generals or 'doctores' (in the learned, not medical, sense), attributing to them burdensome taxation and the creation of inflammatory revolutionary situations. The solution to social problems is naively simple. Si todos se quedasen en sus casitas y trabajaran, este país sería un paraíso. - 'If everyone were to remain at home in their houses working hard, this country would be a paradise.' Certainly her own menage enjoys the simple integrity that can inhere in an uncomplicated entirely self-centred economy. Mamagela has all the bewildered astonishment and disgust of the countryman who looks upon political corruption and chicanery, and does not fail to contrast it with the country idyll, ¡esta hermosura, esta delicia, esta poesía natural! - 'This beauty, this delight, this natural poetry!'

Mamagela's own life and efforts are a microcosm of what Reyles would have us see as the national ideal. After much work and planning, much journeying here and there, for example, her herd of sheep, with its pens and sheds, has become a reality. The event is duly celibrated with a feast and music, which Mamagela interrupts to deliver a heartfelt

homily:

> Queridos amigos nuestros - dijo con el rostro transfigurado -: a todos les deseo salud y felicidad pero santa, de una familia honrada y trabajadora. Vamos a criar lindos carneritos para refinar las majadas, aumentar la lanita de las esquilas y llevar la prosperidad a todas las estancias.

> "Our good friends", she said, her face aglow. "I wish you all health and happiness on this happy day in which we celebrate the modest, but worthy, achievement of an honourable and hardworking family. We are going to raise fine lambs to improve the flocks, increase the wool clip, and bring prosperity to all the stations."

She goes on at some length to observe that the progress of the nation depends on the progress of the rural areas. She inveighs against 'books' and urges everyone to be taught by the demands of the land itself. Parliaments and universities serve but to levy taxes, impose laws and create conflicts where none were.

If Mamagela is the embodiment of the values of the land, Tocles (ironically so named, as it turns out, being a contraction of Themistocles, the ancient saviour of the Greeks) represents the intellectual in society, cut off from

the vital forces that should nourish national life. He is a university product, an academic (with all the pejorative undertones to that word), a verbose bore who drives his wife to distraction with his opinionated verbosity.

Tocles is undoubtedly a caricature of his species, especially as presented in the earlier part of the novel: he has the exaggerated dome of the intellectual, a head that seems too big for his body, and legs almost too thin to support the corpulent trunk; he is foetus-like in appearance, and as incomplete in his attitude to life. He lies in bed until midday, to Mamagela's unending disgust, and is thus fittingly contrasted with the busy peons who have been up since before dawn.

That Reyles' thinking is informed by the imagery of the pastoral ideal of antiquity is evident throughout the novel. What he presents here for our inspection is realized pastoral; the vision has become fact, or rather, perhaps, here is the fact from which the later vision sprang.

The perfect harmony of the pastoral scene of El Ombú serves to highlight Tocles' dilemma:

> Tocles dejó caer la cabeza sobre el pecho y se puso a pensar en sus fracasos mientras escuchaba, como entre sueños, el batir de alas y la algarabía pajaresca del corredor y, juntamente, los lejanos ruídos que venían del campo: dulce mugir, blando balar, rumor de hojas, a las que se unía fraternalmente la monótona melopea del peón que araba, allí cerquita, acuciando a los bueyes con las mismas frases, prolongadas a modo de largo gemido. Repetía indolente: "Vamos, Carpeeeta! ... ! Vamos, Corbaaata!"... Despues reinaban de nuevo los rumores musicales y las vagas sinfonías del campo.

> Tocles let his head fall on to his chest, and began to think of his failings. He listened, as though in a dream, to the beating of wings, the chatter in the passage and, at the same time, to the distant sounds of the fields: sweet lowing of cattle, tender bleatings, the rustle of leaves, into which there flowed the monotonous melopoeia of the peon close by, urging on his oxen with prolonged, indolent phrases: "Giddy-up, Carpeeeta! Giddy-up, Corbaaata!" And then, the musical rustlings and the errant symphonies of the countryside reigned again.

The idyll, however, though always conceived as possible and ideal, exists under the constant threat of disruption, either from the greedy city politicians who plunder the farmer and livestock communities by way of excessive taxation, or from the erruptions of civil war

that depopulate the countryside and devastate farmlands, this latter feature often resulting from the heavy imposition of political authority.

Primitivo, Mamagela's other son-in-law, is the type of the ideal man of the land, from whom the true wealth and prosperity of the country flows. His name intentionally contrasts with the pretentiousness of Temistocles; furthermore, Primitivo is not embroiled in academic theorisation and tortured self-doubt; his place in the economy of things is unambiguous and acknowledged, and he finds a total fulfilment in his rustic tasks that fills him with an inner exaltation of soul:

> Y Primitivo, viéndoles medrados y lozanos, sentía un goce purísimo, plácido y tan hondo, tan hondo, que a veces le dilataba el fornido pecho, del que salía el áspero vello por entre la camisa abierta.
>
> And Primitivo, seeing them [his sheep] thriving and healthy, felt an extreme joy, calm and deep, that at times caused his chest to expand with pride, his shaggy hair showing through his open shirt.

He is both the spiritual and physical opposite of Temistocles. He exists perfectly in his world, until he is destroyed by eruptions from outside it. Such eruptions, disturbing the delicate balance of rural life, stem from officious interference in the affairs of the land. Hence such men as the caudillo (leader) Pantaleón earn Reyles' admiration since they represent the forces of the land, the forces of nativism versus foreign political ideologies:

> Heredero, legítimo de los caudillos históricos, que en el dramático choque entre los principios abstractos y los intereses nacionales representaron a estos, como los doctores a las doctrinas extranjeras, encarnaba en cierto modo, aunque él ní por asomos lo sospechase, acaso el individualismo anárquico del hidalgo, quiza los derechos de la pasión y la ley natural del cacique frente a la regla civilizada, tal vez el instinto vital y castizo del terruño contra la cultura exótica..
>
> [He was] the legitimate heir of the caudillos of the past, who in the dramatic collision between abstract principles and national interests, championed the latter, just as the intellectuals embraced foreign doctrines. He embodied, in a way - although he would never suspect it - perhaps the anarchic individualism of the landed gentry, perhaps the rights of passion and the natural law of the cacique confronted with the rule of civilization, perhaps even the vital and pure instinct of the land against a foreign culture..

Pantaleón in fact achieves almost the dimensions of an epic hero: he is tough and adaptable, capable of all hardships, a brave leader, uncomplaining, whether it be of bitter cold, or of grave wounds, a fine horseman, and thoroughly at home in the wild country of Uruguay - and this by no means exhausts the list of his virtues. His death in battle, dreadful though it is, confirms his claim to the title of hero.

The limbo of political frustration and inaction in which Tocles finds himself induces a profound reassessment of his priorities. Strong family attachments draw him to the land, not least of which is Mamagela herself, who has repeatedly urged the life of the land upon him. The life of action as opposed to his fruitless political theorising appeals to him the more he turns over the possibility in his mind. He will become the land publicist, but his preaching will be by personal example, by a life of labour as a rancher:

¿Quien libertará de la explotación política a los esforzados pioners [sic] de la riqueza nacional? ¿Quién les mostrará a los jóvenes que vegetan en las ciudades, que allí, en el campo, y no en los puestos públicos, está la fortuna, la independencia y también la salud del alma?

Who will liberate the vigorous pioneers of the national wealth from political exploitation? Who will show the young folk who vegetate in the cities that there, on the land, not in public posts, they will find fortune, independence, and also healing of soul?

It is again the sense of dislocation, of being somehow out of tune with reality that distresses Tocles, and that identifies the neo-platonic ancestry of Reyles. He wishes to be done with 'the farce of the city' and to feel stirring within him las energias de la naturaleza y vivir un poco de la vida universal, - 'the energies of Nature and to live a little in the life universal.'

Tocles in fact makes a success of his new life, much to his own surprise, since he had doubted his capacity to embrace a life of direct encounter with the land, fearing that the scholastic pursuit had unfitted him for practical work. A new joy possesses him: he experiences a kind of

moral resurrection, and, symbol of his new life of fruitful labour, his wife gives birth to a child. The politician is metamorphosed into a farmer.

It is, indeed, the estancieros, the ranchers, whom Reyles holds up for our admiration. The conquest of the land is a work that goes on quite independently of the politicians. A breed of man who belongs to the land, full of the virtues of physical courage and endurance, and the moral strength to persevere through repeated misfortune and natural diasters, has come into being. Primitivo functions here are the promising exemplar. Chapter IX of the novel sets out Reyles' thesis clearly and succinctly:

> Con las arboledas, potreros, molinos, modernas construcciones que iban señoreándose de las peladas cuchillas, el paisaje campero se transformaba y de hosco aparecía sonriente: y, al propio tiempo que aquel, cambiaba el ambiente moral, gracias a las ideas y aspiraciones nobles que traía aparejadas la actividad de las estancias. Y así iba formándose fuera de la escuela y de toda influencia urbana, un nuevo tipo social, producto exclusivo de la necesidad económica, cuyas severas disciplinas hacían de cada gaucho levantisco un paisano trabajador, como la política de cada trabajador un gaucho alzao.

> With the groves, ranches, mills, modern constructions that were displacing the naked blade, the countryside was being transformed: instead of being sullen-faced, it appeared smiling. Appropriately, too, the moral climate was changing, thanks to the ideas and aspirations that the ranches were already displaying. Thus there was being forged - entirely apart from the schools and all urban influence - a new social type, an exclusive product of economic necessity, the severe disciplines of which were making of each tumultuous gaucho a working farmer, just as politics made of every labourer a gaucho rebel.

Only the armed insurrections, provoked by the unjust demands of the cities, mar the prospect of a hard-working, prosperous, rural arcady: the moral collapse of Primitivo would never have occurred (as it in fact does) had it not been for the demoralizing instability of the rural economy as a result of cacique uprisings in response to urban imperatives. The energies of the country are being constantly drained and channelled in the wrong directions, and the proper rural goals of the Uruguayan interior consequently frustrated.

Tocles' experiment with the simple life, however, ends in collapse, although the fault does not lie in the life

itself. The mental appetites aroused by his training cannot be submerged, in the last resort, as a result of the nagging sense of pique with his lack of political preferment, in dedication to the soil. To some extent he is the embodiment of the dilemma of the intellectual romantic divorced from one tradition and unassimilated to another. He is equally pathetic in the city and in the country, condemned, in the classic Hamlet style, to inaction. Lofty abstractions and disinterested ideals are often incapable of generating worthwhile action. Tocles remains mentally isolated from the land and its people because the spring of his motivation is intellectual, academic. Reyles is at his weakest here, since what was impossible before that emotional scene in which Tocles breaks down and weeps when Mamagela confesses the shortcomings of her own attitude to him and takes him in her arms in a gesture of maternal love, suddenly becomes possible thereafter. Presumably the point is being made that he failed for lack of emotional and spiritual identification with the land and its people, a thing that becomes

possible now that his relationship with Mamagela is straightened out. The point is, I think, a forced one; we have not been sufficiently prepared for this solution. We had not expected such a radical shortcoming in their relationship, nor is it very clear how its healing achieves such a far reaching effect. At any rate, Reyles would have us understand, a spiritual attitude to the land is a necessary accompaniment to its cultivation. As Tocles puts it: defenderé los intereses rurales haciendo ver, si puedo, su infinita trascendencia para nosotros, no por lo que son en orden material, sino por lo que representan espirtualmente.: 'I shall champion rural interests and demonstrate, if I can, their supreme transcendence for us, not on account of their place in the material order, but for what they represent spiritually.' Now he feels himself part of a rural brotherhood, united by the bonds of common tasks and mutual obligations, and hence now worthy to represent rural interests at the national level. National salvation thus resides in an awakening to an awareness of the importance of the land and

to the superior moral values that hardworking communities close to the soil develop. Ultimately the thing is an individual matter, unrelated to political slogans and laboriously developed constitutions. The simple farming community of Urugray, Reyles would have us understand, provide an object lesson in moral rectitude, inner consistency and harmonious union with the environment, and have much to teach the superficial, bustling and spiritually empty cities. At the level of politics he is an anarchist. At the philosophical, an arcadian.

Chapter 3

José Eustasio Rivera: The Jungle, Vision of Horror

> While the Anglo-Saxon found in the New World natural conditions that were more or less similar to those of Europe, and problems long known to him and which he had long ago learned how to confront, the Portuguese in Brazil faced a world completely strange to him, with very few similarities to his original habitat. For him the cold was probably no novelty, but the tropical heat with a high degree of humidity was unknown to him. The type of virgin forests of North America would not be something new, not absolutely new, in the experience of the European. But the tropical forest of Brazil, the jungle that advances to the very edge of rivers like a veritable well of verdure, certainly would not inspire in him any pantheistic ardors of immediate mastery. On the contrary, his dominant sentiment would be terror, the cosmic terror, that persists in the Brazilian even in our day. (Vianna Moog, Bandeirantes and Pioneers, p.223, George Braziller, N.Y. 1964.

Like the majority of Spanish-Americans, Arturo Cova, the central character of Rivera's La Vorágine (The Whirlpool), a novel of the Colombian jungle published in 1924, is a city man, with all the romantic notions of his kind with respect to the primitive jungles and plains. He is the spiritual heir to a concept of Nature that derives

from European progenitors. It is his lack of direct contact with the hinterlands of his environment that permits the survival of an urban attitude to Nature that has its origins in Europe, and which for long inhibited European travellers and colonialists from seeing the new world as it really was. Smith's European Vision and the South Pacific documents the dilemma superbly. Literary and learned influences had taught European man to see Nature as a refuge from the care-ridden and artificial life of the city, as a means of access to the soul's true abode, and even as an expression of the unspoilt purity of God. The savage, untamed and terrible nature of the South American llanos and selva, supremely inimical to man, was to enforce a radical re-assessment of Spanish-American man's relationship to the natural environment.

This is not to say that the traditional view of Nature as sacred, inviolate, and even benign, is absent from Spanish-American literature - it is not: the plains, especially, retain elements that echo earlier experience, and are capable

of inspiring similarly mystical and idealistic attitudes. But the size of the new continent and the daunting challenge its terrain presented to the new arrivals forced the early colonial communities to hug the coasts and hence to develop as urban counterparts to their European brethren, their eyes often set on Paris and Madrid rather than on the continental interior - a very different experience from the North-American frontiers venturers, who did not remain coast-huggers for long - the nature of the land did not forbid it.

It was the emerging national self-consciousness and the consequent quest for a uniquely Spanish-American literature that turned the eyes of Spanish-American artists inwards, and it was the plains and the jungles that presented themselves to view.

Now the plains - although vast - are more amenable to human penetration, and such idealization of Nature as we

find in the Spanish-American novel is concentrated on the plains and the products of the plains, where grazing and agriculture can develop and where man can, to some extent, impose himself.

The tropical jungle (the selva), however, is a different matter entirely: here man is reduced to a non-entity, to a life-form so alien to it as to suffer from a physical and moral breakdown when exposed to it that is almost total.

La Vorágine has both the plains and the jungle as its scene of action, although the former is largely a grim overture to the latter. The interaction of man and his environment is the author's principal concern; romantic attachments between the principal characters are decidedly subordinate to his main theme.

Arturo Cova, having contracted an affair with a young girl, Alicia, and enraged her parents in consequence, elopes

with her from Bogotá, victim of the vapid romanticism of his kind. Rivera's words, placed in Cova's mouth, parody the sentimental dream of the natural world:

> ¿Para qué las ciudades? Quizá mi fuente de poesía estaba en el secreto de los bosques intactos, de la caricia de las auras, en el idioma desconocido de las cosas; en cantar lo que le dice al peñón la onda que se despide, el arrebol a la ciénaga, la estrella a las inmensidades que guardan el silencio de dios. Allí en esos campos soñé quedarme con Alicia, a envejecer entre la juventud de nuestros hijos, a declinar ante los soles nacientes, a sentir fatigados nuestros corazones entre la savia vigorosa de los vegetales centenarios, hasta que un día llorara yo sobre su cadaver o ella sobre el mío.
>
> For what do cities serve? Perchance for me the fount of poetry was in the secret of the unspoilt forests, in the caress of the gentle breezes, in the unknown language of things; in giving voice to what the departing ripple says to the cliff face, the tinted skies to the marshlands, or the star to the vast plains that preserve the silence of God. I dreamed of being there with Alicia, of growing old amongst a brood of children, of setting amongst rising suns, our hearts failing surrounded by the centenarian forest giants, until one day I should weep over her corpse, or she over mine.

Such is the dream: the reality is something very different. They scarce enter upon the plains before the vision is shattered, for, in the company of don Rafael, who

has offered to act as their guide, they approach some swampy undergrowth in quest of water. The scene is gloomy in the extreme: sluggish yellow swamp waters face them, covered with vegetal growth; galapagos swim in it, and here and there crocodiles lie in wait, and evaporaciones maléficas flotaban bajo los árboles como velo mortuorio, - 'maleficent vapours floated under the trees like a funeral pall' - and Cova barely escapes the clutches of a fat water snake with gaping jaws. The scene ends with a scream of horror from Alicia, and a revolver shot from Cova.

There is little about the plains to correspond with Cova's vision of a holy refuge; on the contrary, it is the scene of uncivilised horrors. Added to the terrors of the wild life, there are the indians, whose camp fires may be seen at night, and with whom they are liable to come into conflict, as indeed they do before they have proceeded much further into the interior. Cova sees the massacre of indian women and experiences the ferocity of an enraged counter-

attack. Violence and horror are the principal ingredients of the life of the interior, and in this Rivera is in essential agreement with Rómulo Gallegos, novelist of Colombia's neighbour, Venezuela. The jungle is no place for the poet or the romantic or the person of fine sensibilities. (Paradoxically, however, Rivera has created a piercingly lyrical poetic prose that admirably captures the sombre majesty of the jungle and the plains.)

The climax of Cova's unpleasant experiences on the plains occurs during a cattle round-up, when a cowboy is hooked off his horse by an enfuriated bull, and tossed like a puppet. As they watch, the unfortunate man's head is ripped right off his body, and rolls into the undergrowth. It is a horror scene that is to haunt Cova repeatedly when he enters the jungle, together with its sequel: the decapitated body borne upon a horse, arms hanging down one side, stiff fingers parting the grass, and on the other, the ghastly neck stump, bloody, and a mass of exposed yellow

nerves. The remains of the head are never found. Cova is near breaking point:

> y con angustia jamás padecida quise huir del llano bravío, donde se respira un calor guerrero y la muerte cabalga a la grupa de los cuartagos. Aquel ambiente de pesadilla me enflaquecía el corazón, y era preciso volver a las tierras civilizadas, al remanso de la molicie, al ensueño y a la quietud.
>
> and with an anxiety that I had never before suffered I longed to flee from the ferocious plains, where the air was filled with the heat of conflict and where death rides on the croup of a nag. That nightmare atmosphere made my heart faint and desirous of returning to civilised parts, to safe back-waters, to the world of fantasy and peace.

The second part of the novel sees Cova entering the jungle itself, in company with his friend Franco, in pursuit of Alicia and Griselda (Franco's woman) who, they learn after returning from the cattle round-up, have gone with the man Barrera to the rubber plantations, for which he has been recruiting labour. (An important theme of the book, but with which we are not directly concerned here, is that of the near-slavery conditions in which many of the

Colombian peonage existed there, tempted with offers of high wages, but ruthlessly exploited by the rubber planters who, owing to their isolation, remained beyond the effective reach of the law.) They plan only to trace the guilty pair, and Barrera, to wipe out the stain upon their honour.

It is important to appreciate that Rivera, himself a poet and erstwhile romantic, is consciously attempting to destroy the legend of the passive and idyllic natural world, or at least insofar as it is encountered in Colombia; and he is doing so on the basis of his own experience in the government service when he was appointed to the Lands Commission and was concerned with establishing demarcation of the border between Colombia and Venezuela. This meant first hand experience of the jungle. Eduardo Neale-Silva says: 'There is one incontrovertible fact, and that is that the poet made several excursions, either on his own account or as official representative of the Commission, and

it is probable that he was lost in one of them, although he may not have wished to admit to this publicly. It was surely on this occasion that he experienced in his own person hunger, fatigue and the sensation of complete helplessness that he paints in his novels.' (48)

The lyrical apostrophe to the jungle that is prefixed to the opening of the second part of the novel sets the tone of magnificent gothic melancholy that is to characterise the remainder of the action, and that reflects Rivera's own state of mind inspired by his experiences. The passage is worth quoting extensively, since it achieves a powerfully cumulative effect, and shows Rivera's great strength as a creator of poetic prose:

> ¡Ah selva, esposa del silencio, madre de la soledad y de la neblina! ¿Qué hado maligno me dejó prisionero en tu cárcel verde? Los pabellones de tus

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(48) Horizonte Humano, p.248, University of Wisconsin Press, 1960.

ramajes, como inmensa, bóveda, siempre están sobre mi cabeza, entre mi aspiración y el cielo claro, que sólo entreveo cuando tus copas estremecidas mueven su oleaje, a la hora de tus crepúsculos angustiosos. ¿Dónde estará la estrella querida que de tarde pasea las lomas? ...

Tú eres la catedral de la pesadumbre, donde dioses desconocidos hablan a media voz, en el idioma de los murmullos, prometiendo longevidad a los árboles imponentes, contemporaneos del paraíso, que eran ya decanos cuando las primeras tribus aparecieron y esperan impasibles el hundimiento de los siglos venturos. Tus vegetales forman sobre la tierra la poderosa familia que no se traiciona nunca ... Tú tienes la adustez de la fuerza cósmica y encarnas un misterio de la creación. No obstante, mi espíritu sólo se aviene con lo inestable, desde que soporta el peso de tu perpetuidad, y, más que a la encina de fornido gajo, aprendió a amar a la orquídea lánguida, porque es efímera como el hombre, y marchitable como su ilusión.

Déjame huir, oh selva, de tus enfermizas penumbras, formadas con el hálito de los seres que agonizaron en el abandono de tu majestad. ¡Tú misma pareces un cementerio enorme donde te pudres y resucitas! ¡Quiero volver a las regiones donde el secreto no aterra a nadie, donde es imposible la esclavitud, donde la vista no tiene obstáculos y se encumbra el espíritu en la luz libre! Quiero el calor de los arenales, la vibración de las pampas abiertas. Déjame tornar a la tierra de donde vine, para desandar esa ruta de lágrimas y sangre, que recorrí en nefando día, cuando tras la huella de una mujer me arrastre por montes desiertos, en busca de la Venganza, diosa implacable que sólo sonríe sobre las tumbas!

Oh jungle, wife of silence, mother of solitude and mists! What evil fate left me captive in your green prison? The canopies of your branches, like an immense vault, are for ever over my head, inexorably fixed between my aspirations and the limpid skies, the skies that I can only glimpse when your tree tops tremble in the anguished falling of the dusk ...

> You are the cathedral of grief, where strange gods talk in whispers, in the tongue of murmurs, promising long life to the lofty trees, the contemporaries of paradise, which were already ancient when the first tribes appeared, and which impassively await the death of future ages. Your flora imposes itself irresistibly upon the earth ... In you I see the sullen gloom of cosmic force, the incarnate mystery of creation. My spirit staggers beneath your ponderous perpetuity, and it has learned to love the languid orchid more than your mighty everygreens, since it, like man, is ephemeral and transient as his thoughts.
>
> Let me flee, oh jungle, from you sickly shades, formed with the breath of beings that suffered under your majestic unconcern. A vast cemetery are you, in which you rot and decompose and spring to life again. Let me return to regions where no secrets terrify, where slavery is unknown, where no obstacles confront the eye, and where the spirit can soar upwards to the blessed light! I long for the warmth of the sands, the vibration of the open plains. Let me return to the land from whence I came, retrace the presumptuous path of tears and blood I trod in the steps of a woman, and in pursuit of Vengeance, implacable goddess that only smiles upon the tomb!

There is, indeed, nothing, absolutely nothing, about the selva to support Cova's youthful and immature dream, and we are reminded that it is the nightmare world of the Fall with which we have to do:

> El transparente charco nos dejó ver un sumergido ejército de caimanes, en contorno de las palmeras, ocupado en recoger pichones y huevos, que caían cuando

las garzas, entre algarabías y picotazos, desnivelaban con su peso las ramazones. Nadaba por dondequiera la innúmera banda de caribes, de vientre rojizo y escamas plumbeas, que se devoran unos a otros y descarnan en un segundo a todo ser que cruce las ondas de su dominio, por lo cual hombres y cuadrúpedos se resisten a echarse a nado y mucho más al sentirse heridos, que la sangre excita instantáneamente la voracidad del terrible pez. Veíase la traidora raya, de altas gelatinosas y arpón venenoso que descansa en el fango como un escudo; la anguila eléctrica, que inmoviliza con sus descargas a quien la toca ...

The transparent water revealed a submarine army of alligators around the palm trees, occupied in snatching up nestlings and eggs that fell when the herons, with their clamorous pecking, disturbed the branches. The countless bands of caribes swam whereever they would, reddish bellied and leaden scaled, devouring one another and, in an instant, stripping the flesh from any creature that crossed their watery territory - for which reason men and quadrupeds never attempt to swim, especially if they are wounded, for blood immediately excites the voracity of the terrible fish. There, too, is the treacherous sting-ray, with its gelatinous fins, lying like a shield in the ooze, and the electric eel that immobilizes with its discharge whatever touches it...

Nor is the land-life any better. Silva, whom they meet up with in the jungle after his escape from the rubber plantations, tells a horror story of the tambochas, the carnivorous ants that march in armies through the jungle, eating everything in their path, putting both men and beasts to terrified flight:

> Por debajo de troncos y raíces avanzaba el tumulto de la invasión, a tiempo que los árboles se cubrían de una mancha negra, como cáscara movediza, que iba ascendiendo implacablemente a afliger las ramas, a saquear los nidos, a colocarse a los agujeros. Alguna comadreja desorbitada, algun lagarto moroso, alguna rata recién parida eran ansiadas presas de aquel ejército, que las descarnaba, entre chillidos, con una presteza de ácidos disolventes.

> The tumultuous invasion advanced beneath the tree trunks and roots, whilst at the same time trees were covered with a black stain; the bark itself seemed to move as the invaders swarmed implacably upwards to afflict the branches, invade nests, and pour into all the holes. Some terrified weasel, some tardy lizard, some new-born rat, were the fearful prey of that army, which stripped their flesh from them as they squeaked, with a speed worthy of solvent acids.

Silva escapes the ants by standing up to his shoulders in water, only to find that the malignant quicksands have gripped him, and he barely escapes with his life.

Surrounded by such horrors that tax one's physical and mental strength, Cova then succombs to swamp fever and sees the already terrible world through nightmare eyes, and his depressed spirits turn suicidal. The delusions provoked by the fever seem real to him. He feels himself falling into a state of moribund catalepsy, sucked down in the green

whirlpool that is the jungle.

Despite his horror of the jungle (he does pile on the agony rather), despite the antagonism that he feels to lurk in its depths, the wild spectacle has stirred him to his depths and inspired a work of art that is half amazed wonder, the quality of his prose shows that. It is not surprising, therefore, to find a conservationist in novelist's clothing. The rubber-seeking exploiters are attacking the integrity of the jungle and despoiling it for future generations. They must not therefore be surprised if the jungle fights back: mientras el cauchero sangra los árboles, las sanguijales lo sangran a él. La selva se defiende de sus verdugos, y al fin el hombre resulta vencido, - 'whilst the rubber-tapper bleeds the trees, the leeches bleed them. The jungle is defending itself from its executioners, and in the end man is defeated.' Or, as he puts it elsewhere:

> los caucheros que hay en Colombia destruyen anualmente millones de árboles. En los territorios de Venezuela el balatá desapareció. De esta suerte ejercen el fraude contra las generaciones del porvenir.

> the rubber tappers in Colombia destroy millions of trees annually. In the territories of Venezuela the balata (bully tree) has disappeared. So that future generations are being cheated of their heritage.

The jungle,then, should be left alone; it is not man's proper sphere of operation. If he presumes to exploit it, he will deserve any fate that it is capable of dealing him. Even the horror cannot expel that deeper reverence for Nature that lies at the centre of Rivera's being. The note of alarm at man's invasion of the natural realm is significantly present here in 1924; how valid a theme this was to be, nearly fifty years later, we are well able to judge. (This aspect of the extension of human control over the jungle is most effectively and artistically treated by the Uruguayan short-story writer, Horacio Quiroga, who sees man as a vile intruder, and a destroyer of nature.)

Nevertheless, the poet's strongest feelings are here reserved for the deep repugnance that his contact with the virgin jungle has evoked. (He died soon after the book's publication, so that his mind is enshrined in one book only.)

Cova is thus Rivera, the innocent romantic tasting Nature in the raw and in the process finds it unfolding to him its deepest horror, and shattering his most cherished illusions. It is the tragic discovery of a man schooled and nurtured in the European tradition, who attempts to approach the new world with the romantic preconceptions of the old. The result is that he finds himself obliged to abandon his naivety and to create a new descriptive language of lyrical horror that alone can do justice to his conception of the wild world as he encounters it. The horror and fear that primitive man must have felt for the great forests of the earth wells up again in the Colombian novelist, and he spurns the effeteness of the bucolic tradition:

> ?Cuál es aquí la poesía de los retiros, donde están las mariposas que parecen flores traslucidas, los pájaros mágicos, el arroyo cantor? !Pobre fantasía de los poetas que sólo conocen las soledades domesticadas!
>
> Nada de risueñores enamorados, nada de jardín versallesco, nada de panoramas sentimentales! Aquí, los responsos de sapos hidrópicos, las malezas de cerros misántropos, los rebalses de años podridos. Aquí, la parásita afrodisíaca que llena el suelo de abejas muertas; la diversidad de flores inmundas que se contraen con sexuales palpitaciones y su olor pegajoso emborracha como una droga ...

> Where is the quiet retreat of poesy? Where the butterflies like translucent flowers, the wondrous birds, the singing streams? Pathetic phantasy of poets that only know domesticated solitudes!
>
> Here are no smiling lovers, no poetic gardens, no sentimental landscapes! Here there is nothing but the croaking of hydropic toads, the thick growth of misanthropic hills, the stagnant waters of rotting courses, the aphrodisiac parasite that covers the ground with dead bees, the diverse varieties of obscene flowers that contract in sexual palpitations, and whose heady scent enebriates like a drug..

And so on. It is the repulsively anti-pastoral world that the science fiction writers, on analogy with the jungles of South America, are to identify with extra-terrestrial worlds. The catalogue of horrors is a length one, and the sonorous prose rolls on like a dirge. Undoubtedly Rivera commands the most superb language of the 'green hell' novels (for there are others contributing to the genre), and it is unfortunate that his reputation as a novelist must rest upon this one work.

Rivera's achievement is undoubtedly of a high order when one considers his contribution to the poetic prose of the Spanish-American novel; but he remains chiefly

significant for preserving in literature the attitude of profound shock and horror that characterised the refined European when confronted with an overwhelming world of vegetal forces, and a vision of the jungle as a dynamically voracious anti-human organism.

The closing words of the novel, defining Cova's fate and that of his companions, bring the narration to an abrupt end as by the final snap of carnivorous jaws:

> ! Los devoró la selva!
> The jungle swallowed them!

Chapter 4

Ricardo Guiraldes and the Pastoral Lament

If the pastoral form is, as I believe, at bottom civilised man's lament for a lost way of life, in what sense may we ask is a work such as Ricardo Guiraldes' Don Segundo Sombra (1926) a modern form of pastoral lament? Borges, for one, considered it 'elegía'. That it is a lament seems clear: the original gaucho (the South-American cowboy) was already a figure disappearing into the past, a casualty to modern life and modern techniques when Don Segundo appeared first. The enclosing of the pampas by barbed wire when the huge estancias made their appearance, the development of the railways, and the rapid passage of refrigerated steam ships carrying Argentinian beef to Europe, meant the end of the nomad gaucho. The gaucho of literature, therefore, is an artistic recreation that enshrines the cultivated man's idea of the ideal, if vanished, man. As Eduardo Romano

observes: La pampa es un mar dentro de la tierra, un paisaje visto con los ojos del estanciero, -'The pampa is an inland sea, a world seen with the eyes of a cosmopolitan rancher.' (47)

The novel takes its name from the gaucho who acts as tutor to the young hero of the book. Don Segundo's protégé, torn between the pampa and the settled life of a wealthy rancher, represents a good deal that was Ricardo Guiraldes himself, whose own life was divided between the pampa and the city (Buenos Aires and Paris, the South-American's cultural capital). This is confirmed by the book's dedication: Al gaucho que llevo en mí, sacramente, como la custodia lleva la hostia, -'To the gaucho that I bear reverently within me, as the monstrance bears the Host.'

Don Segundo is the repository of the collective gaucho virtues that Guiraldes has known at first hand. Eleven such gauchos are named in his dedication, and don Segundo himself is historically based. In writing his paeon

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(47) Análisis de Don Segundo Sombra, p.19, Centro Editor, Buenos Aires, 1967.

to the Argentinian gaucho he has also written a book whose chief purpose is to praise the simple life of a nomad pastoral people, for the gaucho is a pastor in the full and ancient sense of the word. He is what he is <u>because</u> he lives apart from the settled communities in which civilised vices flourish, and <u>because</u> he is removed from the soft life of the city and exposed to hardship and testing. If utopia can exist, it is for Guiraldes distilled in the nomad utopia of the wandering gaucho, a world that is singularly pure, and in which a man may feel a part of the great open spaces of the pampa. And if the world is threatened and on the verge of disappearing, this is not through any intrinsic fault in the gaucho and his world: it is the civilised world that is ever encroaching that makes the gaucho a redundant, anachronistic figure. When, at the end of the book, Don Segundo rides away into the setting sun, he is described as más una idea que un hombre, - 'more an idea than a man': the gaucho departs, leaving the myth in his footsteps.

The book owes a good deal to Spanish picaresque, which always features a young wandering outcast from society as its hero. Here, too, in Don Segundo, a young boy, a runaway from home, joins up with a wandering gaucho - Don Segundo Sombra. The boy leaves his pueblo as a spirited fourteen year old, and returns as a proven young man after several years of cattle driving, to find the settled life of a rich man claiming him. From that settlement stems the growth of the gaucho myth. It is as the nature of the earlier society changes and the sense of nostalgia and deprivation sets in, that the folk-hero is born, whether he be the North-American cowboy of the frontiers experience, the Australian outback pioneer, or the South-American gaucho. And an important function of the literary treatment of such heroes is to embody, to freeze, the values that they represent for the society from which they have sprung. Such heroes need not, indeed often do not, share a life in common with the majority of their compatriots: Sin embargo, no abundaban los hombres siempre dispuestos a emprender las duras marchas, tanto en invierno como en verano, sufriendo sin queja ni

desmayos la brutalidad del sol, la mojadura de las lluvias, y el frío tajeante de las heladas y las cobardías del cansancio', - 'Nevertheless, there are not many prepared to undertake rough journeyings in summer and winter alike; not many prepared to suffer the brutality of the sun, the soaking rains, the piercing frosts and the weakening of the will induced by extreme fatigue without complaint or surrender.' The gaucho lives out values that succeed in commanding the admiration of his city-centred fellows. He is what the majority would like to identify themselves as, in essence, being. Behind it all, lies the persistent, dogged notion, from time immemorial that the man close to the land is a truer man than his urban counterpart. His life is lived against the backdrop of the great open spaces, where he can be an individual, the master of his own fate, and not the highly organised, restricted member of a complex city society.

The picture of the gaucho that Guiraldes presents in Don Segundo Sombra is a subtle one. The book is not simply

Spanish-American outback picaresque; it is an essay on an entire attitude to life, an attempt to give literary form and expression to virtues called forth by the nature of the life of the pampas. First there is the profound and exhilarating sense of <u>freedom</u> that the gaucho experiences, and that has always been a vital part of the yearning to escape that characterises the pastoral genre:

> Más fuerte que nunca vinó a mí el deseo de irme para siempre del pueblito mezquino. Entreveía una vida nueva hecha de movimiento y espacio.
>
> The desire to flee the restrictions of village life for ever come to me stronger than before. I was beginning to glimpse a new life made of movement and space.

It is the 'satisfaction of being free' that motivates the young hero of the book to attach himself to Don Segundo, sensing possibilities that the city would always deny him. The village (a gaucho rarely encounters a city at all; the village here simply serves as a microcosm of the city) is the object of mistrust and dislike:

> Para mí todos los pueblos eran iguales, toda la gente más o menos de la misma laya, y los recuerdos que tenían aquellos ambientes, presurosos e inútiles, me causaban antipatía.
>
> For me all villages were alike, and their people more or less of the same ilk. The memory of them, with their hurried and useless ways, filled me with disgust.

The pampas breed an individualist who is full of nerviosidad and unease out of his chosen setting. The gaucho is anárquico y solitario, a man reduced to few words by the enormity of his environmental setting. The continual society of men concluía por infligir un invariable descancio, 'ended by inflicting an interminable weariness.'

Often, too, the urbs feel uncomfortable in the presence of the rus, with its primitive vigour that is not quite nice. When heels and spurs stamp in the agitation of the dance

> Algunas mujeres hacían muecas de desagrado, ante

> las danzas paisanas, que querían ignorar; pero una alegría involuntaria era dueña de todos nosotros, pues sentíamos que aquella era la mímica de nuestros amores y contentos.
>
> Some women made grimaces of displeasure at the rustic dancing, and wanted to ignore it; but we felt an involuntary joy seize us, for we felt that theirs was a pale copy of our enthusiasms and delights.

Federico García Lorca attempted to define this 'involuntary joy' as an artistic muse that Southern Spaniards called duende. It is primitive, it is fundamental, and is closely associated with the gypsies (a people free of sterile city living). It is force and struggle, a power that all feel at times but which no philosophy has been able to define, reaching into the roots of the earth. It is, indeed, he says, 'the spirit of the earth', that 'surges up from the soles of the feet', producing a sensation of freshness and an almost religious enthusiasm, 'a lesson in Pythagorean music'. (48)

The gaucho, too, is tellurically attuned, sunk in the solitary action of his nomad life, and lost in communion with the great silence of the plains; he senses a strengthening

(48) Theory and Function of the Duende, Federico García Lorca, delivered by him before the universities of Havana and Buenos Aires in 1930; Pye, Nonesuch Records, 1961, PPL.202

of soul that places him firmly amongst the mystics of mankind. Al dejar que entrara en mí aquel silencio, the boy reflects, sentía más fuerte y más grande, - 'by opening myself to that silence I felt myself to be stronger, and bigger.' The gaucho of the River Plate area is not far removed from his mystical, neo-platonist soul-mates of the Iberian peninsula: a man of the wilderness, attuned to the diurnal rhythms of the world, and possessed of a deep antipathy for the dissonant city. His harsh life brings him profound satisfaction and almost religious sense of fulfilment, endowing him with a proper sense of his place in the scheme of things. La inmensidad del mundo, 'the immensity of the world', is impressed upon him, which has the effect, not indeed of making him insignificant in his own eyes, but of stretching and enlarging his soul, of developing in him an alma de horizonte, 'a soul that belongs to the horizons'. The feeling is a universal one, glimpsed from time to time by his urban counterpart, and accounting for the unfailing attraction that the unfettered life of the wilds holds for

the urban dweller, and that he loves to live vicariously through the novel.

The gaucho's world holds little place for a woman. The life is too harsh, the demands too insistent to hold a place for the female sex. Me dominó la rudeza de aqellos tipos callados ... dejé la barbilla sobre el pecho, encerrando así mi emoción, - 'The rudeza (simple rustic integrity) of those silent gauchos won my heart ... I dropped my chin onto my chest to hide the strength of my emotion.' Strong personal attachments are made rather with one's saddle companions. Gaucho values are learnt and passed on as through a confraternity. What we have here is a species of South-American 'mateship' forged in the vicissitudes of outback life. In this respect, irresistibly, one sees Argentina, of all the Latin American countries, in terms of outback Australia; so different in so many ways, and yet presenting a phenomenon of relationships which the Australian (if only through his literature) can respond to immediately. Don Segundo is the vehicle for the transmission

of the gaucho ethic:

> También por el supé de la vida, la resistencia y la entereza en la lucha, el fatalismo en aceptar sin rezongos lo sucedido, la desconfianza para con las mujeresyla bebida, la prudencia entre los forasteros, la fé en los amigos.
>
> From him also I learnt the lessons of life - strength and fortitude in the struggle, the fatalism that accepts life without complaint, moral strength in the face of affairs of the heart, the mistrust of women and drink, reserve in the presence of strangers, faith in one's mates.

Tal amistad, says Eduardo Romano, asume incluso caracteres homoeróticos, (49) there is a homoeroticism about such friendships that the life imposes, a phenomenon observed also in the womanless Australian outback. Naturally, the virtues most prized are masculine ones called forth by the nature of the pampa life. To be muy macho - every inch a man - is every gaucho's proper goal, an ambition conspicuously present wherever pioneering man is found at grips with a recalcitrant land.

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(49) Análisis de Don Segundo Sombra. p.41, Centro Editor, Buenos Aires, 1967.

We are not surprised therefore when the young gaucho, adopted son of Fabio Caceres, finds himself facing a crisis moral when, after having been so totally identified with the gaucho, he finds himself heir to an estancia that will mean the end of his nomad life, and that will mean also the severing of gaucho bonds which had given meaning and significance to his life:

> Antes, es cierto, fui un gaucho, pero en aquel momento era un hijo natural, escondido mucho tiempo como una verguenza. En mi condición anterior, nunca me ocupé de mi nacimiento; guacho y gaucho me parecían lo mismo, porque entendía que ambas cosas significaban ser hijo de Diós, del campo y de uno mismo. Así hubiese sido hijo legítimo, el hecho de poder llevar un nombre que indicare un rasgo y una familia me hubiera parecido siempre una reducción de libertad; algo así como cambiar el destino de una nube por él de un árbol, esclavo de la raíz prendida a unos metros de tierra.

> Formerly, it is true, I was a gaucho, but in that moment I became a bastard, who had been hidden away out of sight for a long time, a thing of shame. In my earlier condition I never once thought of my birth; orphan and gaucho - both seemed the same, for I had understood that both things meant to be a child of God, of the land, and to belong to oneself. If I had been a legitimate child, able to bear a name that would indicate respectability and a family, it would have seemed always like a restriction on my liberty; rather like changing from a cloud into a tree, and thus becoming a slave to a root fastened into a few metres of earth.

Such things matter only in the city. Out there on the pampas, a man's birth or name is not important: what matters is what he is, how he emerges from the tests of character that he must face. ?De modo que ni tus padras quedrás nombrar? - 'So you won't name your parents?' ?Padres? No soy hijo más que del rigor, juera esa, casta no tengo nenguna, - 'Parents? I have no parents at all but hardship'. The life has certainly proved its power as a matrix of character: success in conquering the severities of gaucho living gives him a sense of being filled with un vigor descarado a fuerza de confianza, 'a bold vigour inspired by self-confidence'. In a revealing remark, Guiraldes says La tierra era para mí la madre, y el hombre el hijo vencedor, - 'For me the land was a mother, and man her conquering son' (50) The land is his by right of conquest: he is full of scorn for so-called owners of land who have not proved their title in personal struggle and encounter:

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(50) Obras Completas, p.548, cited by Eduardo Romano, Análisis, op.cit.

¡Mis heredades! Podía mirar alrededor, en redondo, y decirme que todo era mio. Esas palabras nada querían decir. ?Cuando en mi vida de gaucho, pensé andar por campos ajenos? ?Quién es más dueño de la pampa que un resoro? Me sugería una sonrisa el solo hecho de pensar en tantos dueños de estancia, metidos en sus casas, corridos siempre por el frío o por el calor, asustados por cualquier peligro que les impusiera un caballo arisco, un toro embravecido o una tormenta de viento fuerte. ?Dueños de qué? Algunos parches de campo figurarían como suyos en los planos, pero la pampa de Dios había sido bien mía, pues sus cosas me fueron amigas por derecho de fuerza y baquía.

My inherited estates! I could look around me in all directions and say that it was all mine. But the words meant nothing. When had I ever, as a gaucho, walked through lands that were not mine? It made me laugh merely to think about all those 'owners' of ranches, shut up safely in their houses, fearful of the cold and the heat, terrified by a tough horse or a fierce bull, or by a gale. Owners of what? Of some stretches of land that they reckon theirs according to the surveyor's records; but the pampas of God had been mine by right of conquest and skill.

But the rustic life cannot survive the steady onslaught of the expanding cities and modern techniques. Pastoral, as an actual way of life, must perish: it must become <u>más idea</u>, more an idea, than anything else. Thus Guiraldes concludes his novel with the hero fighting a strong rearguard action, striving to preserve rustic values

in an increasingly non-rustic world.

> Baste decir que la educación que me daba Don Leandro, los libros y algunos viajes a Buenos Aires con Raucho fueron transformándome en lo que se llama un hombre culto. Nada, sin embargo, me daba la satisfacción potente que encontraba en mi existencia rústica.
>
> Let it suffice to say that the education that Don Leandro gave me, books and various visits to Buenos Aires with Raucho, were transforming me outwardly into what is called a cultured man. Nothing, however, gave me the powerful satisfaction that I encountered in my rustic existence.

The yearning for an entirely integrated world purged of grossness, as I have shown in the introduction to this thesis, was anciently felt, and gave birth to the pastoral ideal. The simpler life was, the more easily might harmony be achieved. Guiraldes, on his own confession, writes in obedience to this same dictate, and creates in his novel a world partly real, but very largely aspiration. The result is the gaucho myth of Don Segundo:

> La necesidad de un mundo total armónico ha sido siempre una idea fija de mis elucubraciones cerebrales y desde hace tiempo quería concretarles en un libro.(51)

> The need for a totally harmonious world has always been a fixed idea of my thinking and for some time I have wanted to give form to it in a book.

As Eduardo Romano has observed, gauchismo is a state of soul, and, quoting Ivonne Bordelois, the pampa far from being a place of abandonment, of total dispersion, is the secure refuge, the deep and dark spring, the centripetal force that brings a man back to himself. (52)

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(51) Obras Completas, p.520, 1962, cit. by Eduardo Romano, Análisis op.cit.

(52) Genio y Figura de Ricardo Guiraldes, Bs.As., Eudeba, p.65, Eduardo Romano, op.cit. p.53.

Chapter 5

Rómulo Gallegos: The Land and the Cult of Violence

Stanislav Andreski has remarked that the first president of an independent Venezuela was an illiterate cowboy (llanero), who rose to power in the ranks of Bolívar's army and maintained his power over his wild warriors by challenging any who disputed his authority to fist fights. The tradition of lawlessness and personal desafío has remained. The country has ever since oscillated between anarchy and tyranny, its army constantly interfering in the conduct of politics.

The tradition of violence in Venezuela has had many interpreters, of whom Rómulo Gallegos, in his novels, is one. Andreski, linking his own views to those the Venezuelan Luque, observes:

'In a recent book, Los Viajeros de Indias, a Venezuelan physician, Felipe Herrera Luque, maintains that the murderous proclivities of the conquerors were genetically determined (as they were a self-selected collection). Owing to their extraordinary prolificity, he claims, the genes of these men account for the contemprary Venezuelan's addiction to violence which manifests itself in (among other things) an extremely high number of murders. Even if we reject this genetic interpretation, the fact remains that the conquest, besides being a traumatic lesson in butchery, fused together peoples with strong cults of violence. To the Spanish traditions of duelling and bull fights were added the legacies of human sacrifice and cannibalism.'(52)

Testimonies to the violent tradition in Venezuela abound. The country has experienced something like fifty-two major revolutions in the first century of its

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(52) Stanislav Andreski, Parasitism and Subversion, The Case of Latin America, p.40, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1966. It is, however, only fair to point out that the charges of cannibalism in Venezuela have been hotly refuted by, amongst others, Julio Salas of Venezuela, Colombian Hermann Trimborn, and Brazilian Fernando Carneiro. Vide: Henry Bernstein, Venezuela and Colombia, p.14, Prentice Hall, U.K. 1964.

independent life. L. Hanke, in his History of Latin America records that Hegel expressed to his students in Berlin that the American Republics frequently existed by right of force, not by democracy. (53) The charge is substantially true today. Hanke also observes that 'the extreme horrors of the guerra a muerte in Venezuela ... were not often matched elsewhere ... the terrible destruction reached is maximum in Venezuela.' (54)

I. The expression of lawlessness is least capable of restraint in the rural interior, and this is the setting chosen by Rómulo Gallegos in his novel Canaima (1935), a biting condemnation of the traditional machismo and hombría of his country. These are words not readily translatable into direct English equivalents; they refer to the cults of aggressive male-ness, of fighting

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(53) Vol. II, p.47, Methuen, London, 1969.

(54) ibid. p.4.

masculinity. The jungle both breeds this kind of man and in so doing reduces him to his lowest moral self: thus reduced is Gallegos' main thesis.

Gallegos writes as a civilised man of the city who looks with acute distaste at the breed of man encouraged by the country's interior. A great deal of the city man's blend of fascinated attraction and fearful repulsion in the face of the silent, green hinterland that is the constant backdrop to the towns finds its keen expression in the novel. As for Rivera, it is a place of fevers, fierce beasts, snakes and innumerable other evils that lie in wait to destroy those intrepid or foolhardy enough to venture in. Here is the selva antihumana, el infierno verde, 'the anti-human jungle', 'the green hell', where nothing and nobody reigns sino las fuerzas vegetales, 'except the vegetal forces'. For the city man, these parts are inmensas regiones misteriosas donde aun no ha penetrado el hombre, 'mysterious,

immense regions, still unpenetrated by man', a constant testimony to la colonización inconclusa','an inconclusive colonization'.

But distaste for an interior so resistent to civilizing forces is less important to Gallegos than the breed of man that it encourages. The jungle is a natural refuge to society's outcasts, and to its criminals. If the caciques (local bosses) rule beyond the confines and environs of the city, in the jungle is to be found the outright cut-throat, the killer in flight from justice, the debt-evaders and the violent men. Here in the novels of Gallegos is a large slice of Venezuelan social history preserved and vividly interpreted. These are the days before oil became the country's cornucopia. These are the days of gold and rubber - both accessible only to those prepared to abandon the cities and chance their luck in the embrutecedora, the 'brutalizing', interior. Men disappear into the selva and come back

rich to drink, dance and gamble their money away in Ciudad Bolívar: but they maintain a conspiracy of silence on the 'dark tragedies' that the selva witnesses. All that survives in their tales is the romantic and stirring myth of an adventure-filled interior that excites a misconceived sense of adventure in the young.

Gallegos, a man of fine political sensibilities (he was to be elected President of his country for a few brief months before being ousted by a revolutionary coup ofthe kind he condemns so forthrightly in his novels) is alive to the negative forces in Venezuelan life. Speaking his mind through one of the novel's few good characters, Manuel Ladera, a carrier virtually forced out of business by the operations of the local cacique, he observes:

> Al purguo y al oro llaman la bendición de esta tierra, pero yo creo que son la maldición. Despueblan los campos y no civilizan la selva... nuestros campesinos ambicionan hacerse ricos en tres meses de montaña purguera y ya no qieren ocuparse en la agricultura.

> They call rubber and gold the blessing of this country, but I believe that they are the curse of it. They suck people away from the land and fail to bring civilization to the jungle ... our farm workers are so anxious to get rich in three months on the rubber plantations that they can't be bothered with agriculture.

And here we are face to face with the underlying and major theme of the novel: the confrontation between civilization and barbarism. Ladera lives a life subject to the unrestrained terrorism of the local cacique, José Francisco Ardavín, who, refused by Ladera's daughter Maigualida, resorts to murder and the threat of it to keep away other suitors; and in the interior he is able to get away with it. In Ladera's eyes, the initial civilizing impulse has weakened in Venezuela and a moral corruption has set in, of which the get-rich-quick fever, the eruption of cacique rule and the tendency to political insurrection and revolt are the evidence.

But the central object of Gallegos' attack is the bush philosophy, the ideal of el hombre macho, the

'he-man' notion, in which brute force and compulsion and bloodletting are the highest objects of veneration. Only secondly is the selva itself cast in the role of villain. Nevertheless, the two are closely associated in his mind, for the one (the selva) encourages the other, el hombre macho, semidiós de las bárbaras tierras, 'the all-male man, the demi-god of the barbarous lands'. One may notice, in passing, how similarly disoriented Australian political and social conditions, together with the inaccessible nature of the outback, made possible, for a while, the criminal bush-hero, a fugitive from justice, the bush-ranger, who established a behavioural ethic that was anti-authoritarian and which, despite the fact that it drew its sustenance from criminal soil, succeeded in commanding the imagination of the currency (i.e. Australian-born, or colonial sons), just as the North-American cowboy, often lawless, commanded a comparable admiration in areas where the arm of the law was weak and ineffective.

Certainly for Marcos Vargas, the young hero of Canaima, this admiration, stimulated from youth hacia la acción desbordada, 'towards unrestrained action', is the central dilemma of his life. His English education in Trinidad (i.e. his subjection to civilizing influences) leaves him substantially unchanged in his pressing desire for a man's life of action in the jungle. Like the gaucho of the continental south, he wishes to be free of restraints, to be muy macho, 'every inch a man': the difference lies in their respective arenas of action. The gaucho proves himself in the open and productive life of the prairies, Marcos in the jungle, whose atmosphere is negative and dehumanising. The novel, indeed, takes its title from the malicious spirit of the selva - Canaima - whose malign forces are revealed in a thousand different ways. No man who enters the selva returns the same: he suffers a moral transformation that is wholly repugnant. He returns with the characteristically suspicious and

mistrustful look of the 'jungle conquerors'.

Marcos has managed to shake himself free of his mother and home, ostensibly to purchase Ladera's business; but when he and Ladera meet Ponchopire, the exotic indigene of the wilds whom he had first met as a youth, and who had left him como bajo el influjo de un hechizmiento, 'as if under the influence of witchery', he again feels la fascinación de aquel mundo de la selva misteriosa y el aborigen enigmático, 'the fascination of that mysterious jungle world and the enigmatic aboriginal.'

Bearing in mind Gallegos' earlier remarks in the novel, Marcos Vargas is only an extreme example of the attitude of the young, city-dwelling man who feels the pull of the jungle and who has the urge to prove his manhood in it, as though attracted by some force of vegetal magnetism.

Again, it is the aborigenes who show up to the best advantage, an important aspect of the novel that we shall notice more particularly below. Let it suffice to observe here that Ponchopire has his values intact - it is the white men, the vencedores de la selva, 'the jungle conquerors', who are the corrupt ones. Hence Ponchopire always demands payment for services rendered to the white man in order that he might bury the money in the earth, and thus return to the earth the gold taken from it, the gold that is Guyana's curse.

Gabriel Ureña, a radio-telegraphist, also feels the romantic attraction of the jungle wilds. For him the selva is both la tierra sagrada, 'the holy land', and the realm of Satan. He pores over maps of the hinterland, hypnotized by the indigenous place-names;

> El drama de la selva virgen, la llanura solitaria, el monte inexplorado, y el río inútil ... las calamidades de aquella región substraída al progreso y

> abandonada al satánico imperio de la violencia, eran de la naturaleza de las maldiciones bíblicas.
>
> The drama of the virgin jungle, the solitary plains, the unexplored forests and the useless river ... the calamities of that region set apart from progress and abandoned to the satanic rule of violence, seemed to rest under the biblical curse.

This is the land of the Fall, no longer a paradise, but the land of the murderer Cain, the outlaw from the wrath of God, the land that is to be a curse to man ('Cursed be the land for thy sake'). Evidently the biblical myths are as richly suggestive to Gallegos as they were to the Iberian poet Antonio Machado, who speaks of the Spanish plains as the land por donde cruza erante la sombra de Cain, 'across which is cast the wandering shadow of Cain'. And yet the wilderness, in the biblical context, is also the place of trial and testing, the abode of daemons, a place where the direct encounter with Satan is made, an adjunct of the holy land to which the city-folk have recourse in response to

the voice of the Baptist, 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness'. In an unmistakeable, yet cryptic, allusion to this, Gallegos speaks of the selva both as Satan's realm (satánico imperio) and as the holy land (tierra sagrada), where the prophetic voice of rebuke can be heard - una gran voz que clamaba en el desierto, 'a great voice crying in the wilderness'. It is a trial to which Gabriel Ureña, when it comes to the point, refuses to submithimself, preferring the relative security of the city. His attitude is totally incomprehensible to Marcos Vargas, who simply cannot understand how a man can submit to the insignificant life of a telegraphist when close at hand in the land of promise (tierra de promisión), lies the opportunity of wealth. But, of course, Ureña's repugnance is really reserved for the negative characteristics that such a life is likely to foster in a man, that admiration for aggressive male toughness (la admiración por la hombría), praised even by so sensible and contained a man as Manuel Ladera - who is to suffer the ultimate irony

of perishing under the law of hombría. For Ureña, it is a simple 'manifestation of barbarism'.

In reponse to its lure, and his own youthful inclination, Marcos Vargas enters the selva: Quería encontrar la medida de sí mismo ante la Naturaleza, 'he wanted to measure himself against the forces of Nature'. Here is a theme common to the pioneering countries. The land is conceived of as a personal antagonist against which man pits his wits and tests his metal. Ultimately it belongs to the rebellious Byronic romantic tradition, and to the Nietzchean notion of superman, who by the exercise of his imperious will imposes himself upon life, and whose ideals are those of the warrior, of the strong man, the conqueror.

The natural climax of the novel is reached when Vargas, resolved to prove himself above the common measure, and filled with exaltation before the gathering

tropical storm, strips himself naked for the encounter. The very jungle itself appears afraid, so that se sintió superior a ella, libre de su influencia maléfica, 'he felt himself to be superior to it, and (therefore) free of its malign influence.' Hitherto the jungle had always emerged as victor over the would-be conqueror. It lured him on only to drive him mad with the life of isolation, or to inflict its poison upon him and drive him to abominable excesses.

Gallegos carefully prepares the scene of Marcos' struggle with the elements by providing a suitably degrading contrast to him - the negro, semi-mad with pain, preparing to chop off a superating and rotted index finger on his left hand with a jungle machete. When the electrical storm does break, Marcos experiences both a sense of conquest and of identification with the wild disordered world of which he is a part: civilised man is once again integrated into the primaeval cosmos:

> la más íntima esencia de su espíritu participaba de la naturaleza de los elementos irascibles y en el espectáculo imponente que ahora le ofrecía la tierra satánica se hallaba a sí mismo, hombre cósmico, desnudo de historia, reintegrado al paso inicial al borde del abismo creador ... un robusto orgullo de pleno hallazgo propio lo hacía lanzar su voz ingenua entre el clamor grandioso. - !Aquí va Marcos Vargas!

> the most intimate essence of his spirit partook of the nature of the angry elements, and in the imposing spectacle that the satanic earth now presented to him he discovered himself - cosmic man, stript of history, reintegrated, through the first lightning flashes, at the edge of the creation abyss ... the revelation stirred a deep pride within him and made him shout through the storm, 'Here stands Marcos Vargas!'

But really the experience issues in no significant illumination: it has only served the aggrandisement of his own ego and confirmed him in his predilection for la hombría. As he is being measured for a new suit of clothes he reflects that ahora menos que nunca le servirán las medidas de los demas, 'now less than ever will he be content with being reckoned as other men.' Later, his conduct received Ureña's rebuke, for he is in fact little different from a hundred other lawless, self-

sufficient men of the interior, for ever seeking to prove their manhood, and he is advised:

> Te has hecho un grave daño moral y es necesario que ahora rehagas tu vida... Lee un poco, cultívate, civiliza esa fuerza bárbara que hay en tí.
>
> You have done yourself grave moral injury, and now you must reshape your life... Read a little, cultivate yourself, civilize that barbaric force in you.

Marcos is, indeed, not a totally evil man: the generous impulses are there, but overlaid and suppressed by the harsher values of hombría. His sympathy for the indigene, for example, is real: he even contemplates leading them into insurrection against their creole oppressors. But he is the product of the rude, lawless, immature society that characterises Venezuela; his values are those of a new, brash country, the primary values of male aggressiveness and self-sufficiency, essentially anti-social. One detects, too, the older influence of a muy macho, very male, Spain, especially

in the attitude the male adopts towards a woman:

> Estaba enamorado de ella [Aracelis] , le parecía la más linda de todas las criaturas, la única apeticible entre todas las mujeres y se deleitaba en contemplarla; pero también parecíale que no era de hombres demonstrar ternura ni manifestarse enamorado de mujer alguna como no fuese por los modos violentos del apetito de posesión.

> He was in love with her [Aracelis] , she seemed the most beautiful of creatures to him, the one desirable woman, and he loved to look at her; but it also seemed to him that it was not manly to show tenderness, nor to show love for any woman unless it were by violent means dictated by the lust to possess.

There is, therefore, no such profound commitment to Aracelis as she feels for him: he can easily contemplate abandoning her, and he does, reflecting that if money is not an all-consuming objective for him, neither is love. He feels

> Supremo desdén ... por todo lo que pareciese limitación de la fiera hombría y el individualism señero.

> supreme scorn ... for all that might appear to place restraint upon wild manliness and solitary individualism.

He scorns the employment of the processes of law and sets out himself to track down his brother's killer. This is thereal reason for his entering the jungle-realm of el dios frenético, the 'frenzied god' - it provides the válvula de escape, 'the escape valve', to the death cry in man.

Ureña alone perceives the conflict in Marcos. He recognizes the boy's underlying qualities, which, directed aright, could have positive value for his society and people. Marcos had already toyed with the idea of helping the downtrodden indigenes of Venezuela, but again, characteristically, it was to be achieved in the way of violence. Ureña, the spokesman for the spirit of non-violence, sees in Marcos a possible 'messiah', one who, in the approved messianic manner, might point the way to a life of noble example and service, and that might

accomplish social redemption, which

> era, discursivamente, lo que Marcos había sentido reverlársele de pronto, de manera intuitiva, confusa, verdaderamente tormentoso, la noche de la tempestad.
>
> it was, indeed, what Marcos had felt revealed to him suddenly, in an intuitive, confused and truly tormented manner, the night of the jungle storm.

But his alma bajo, his lower self, triumphs, so that he hears Ureña's words only in a 'vague and distant way'.

Abandoning Aracelis, who refuses to agree to living with him in the unmarried state, Marcos makes a jungle legend of himself for wild living. The life of self-assertion becomes an obsession, an irresistible imperative: he can brook no rival. When he meets the jungle outlaw Cupira, the latent quarrel is there of two men en la disputa del fiero senorío de la selva, 'in dispute for the lordship of the jungle'. We must, of

course, allow for some exaggeration. Gallegos wants to make a point, and we must allow him to do so. He is tilting against an attitude of mind (one might almost say a state of soul) that is ruinous for Venezuela and that is a plague not only for that country but for many others in Spanish-America, an attitude that is not amenable to compromise, that is querulous, and that continually issues in internecine bloodshed. The allegory is obvious. Soon, under the intensity of his negative emotions, Marcos Vargas declines physically. The physical collapse reflects the moral. His now sunken eyes take on a fugitive expression; his hair turns white, and he becomes incapable of easy social discourse. The jungle experience has been a total disaster, a de-civilizing process.

It is reserved for Gabriel Ureña to feel a sense of wholeness and integrity in his experience of Nature, and this stems from his inner sanity. In describing the

peace that Gabriel enjoys on his honeymoon, Gallegos might have come straight from reading the neo-platonists, especially Fray Luís de León. There is, it is true, some ambivalence in his attitude to Nature (especially to the selva), but it is an important thesis of Gallegos that it is the intrusion of man upon Nature that strikes the disharmonious note. Already, when describing the selva he has spoken of la salvaje quietud ... donde a ratos afinaba sus melodias el invisible pájaro-violin, 'the savage quietude ... where now and again the unseen violin-bird injected its melodies.' This is intentionally contrasted with the golpe de machete del purguero castrando el árbol pródigo, 'the blow of the rubber tapper's machete castrating the fruitful tree'. Now, in a neo-platonic pastorale, Ureña awakens in his rustic house to the dawn chorus of the birds and the lowing of cattle; the sun is tender, and the air beneficent, so that he feels himself

> volviendo a experimentar algo de la antigua emoción de las palabras mágicas cuando los peones lo revelaban el secreto de las cosas, expresándose con el lenguaje vivo y sugerente del hombre en contacto con la Naturaleza.
>
> feeling again something of the old emotion of the magic of the peons' words when they revealed the secret of things to him, expressing themselves in the living and suggestive language of those in contact with Nature.

There are strong echoes of Ricardo Rojas here too: the formative and valuable lessons of life that await the colonial Spaniard are to be learnt from the aboriginal and the land of which he is a product.

Marcos, too, - the embodiment of the restless and ultimately unadapted creole - finds a kind of solace among the indians. Downtrodden and degraded though they are, some tattered remnants of their integrity remain when they succeed in living apart from the creole Spaniards. Their simple life, in which they share all things in common, and in which tribal love and solidarity reign (in

marked contrast to the disoriented Marcos, who walks alone, wrapped in his own passionate ego), is not without a certain therapeutic effect upon the young man: pasada la tormenta espiritual, lo envolvía en la suave voluptuosidad de una paz profunda, 'the spiritual torment past, it enfolded him in the soft voluptuousness of a deep peace.' Many years later, his half-caste son emerges from the jungle, presumably to attempt to synthesize in his life the hitherto contradictory elements of the jungle and the city.

II. In Canaima, Gallegos provides us with an archetype of the civilized man claimed by the bush and who loses his somewhat tenuous hold on civilized life as a result of espousing bush values and philosophy.

In Doña Bárbara (1929), we are presented with another male figure who is in danger of being dragged

into the lawless world of the plains, the llano, but who survives through a fortunate twist of fate and through his own essential residual virtue, and thus establishes that civilized conduct in the country's interior is possible, the novel's principal thesis.

For like the selva, the llano too tends to bring out the latent aggressiveness in man and to expose his 'civilization' as a flimsy thing, fragile in the extreme - although this is the llano of the creole conqueror, not that of the simple gaucho. Survival of the fittest here means the survival of the most ruthless. It is a theme that is persistently present in the literature of a continent that has particularly suffered from the overthrow of law and from the consequent internecine strife and 'the law of the jungle'.

The novel depends for its effect, and for the argument of its thesis, upon a vital counterpoising of

opposites embodying the characteristics of city versus country.

On the one hand is Santos Luzardo, the embodiment of city attributes. Much to his peon's disgust, he turns up on his property after years of absence, since boyhood, the very caricature of the city man, with no suggestion of hombría, the tough 'maleness' that the life demands. He has an insolent city elegance. His skin, now delicately tinged by the sun, is that of the city-dweller, soft and ~~and~~ unworked. He has a mincing mannered way that irritates. His very riding gear is elegantly dated. And, worst of all, his upper lip is shaven clean of the moustache, universally regarded in the interior as the sign of the male. La vida de la ciudad y los habitos intelectuales habían barrido de su espíritu las tendencias hacia la vida libre y bárbara del hato, 'City life and intellectual pursuits had rid his spirit of inclinations towards the free and barbaric

life of the country estate.'

But Santos is not only alienated from his rural origins; in common with many intellectually awakened Spanish-Americans he feels a deep (and snobbish) dislike of his homeland. The ideal city exists only in the old world, en la vieja y civilizada Europa, 'in the ancient and civilized Europe'. The expatriate life attracts him, as it had attracted many of his compatriots who were culturally dependent on Paris, finding Caracas incapable of fulfilling their cultural tastes and aspirations. However, the up-river journey to his family property, Altamira, of which he is now heir, and his first encounter with Melquíades Gamarra, 'El Brujeador', the ugly and ruthless right-hand man of the notorious female bush-boss, Doña Bárbara, stirs the beginnings of resentment in him and awakens a desire in him not to surrender the field to the breed of outback terrorist that the plains have given birth to.

But it is not only a moral repugnance for the brutal and ignorant bosses of the plains that possesses him; the land itself invites battle by its dynamic intransigence in the face of attempts to civilize it, to bring it under agricultural and civil obedience:

> Por el trajecto, ante el espectáculo de la llanura desierta, pensó muchas cosas: meterse en el hato a luchar contra los enemigos, a defender sus propios derechos y también los ajenos, atropellados por los caciques de la llanura, puesto que doña Bárbara no era sino uno de tantos; a luchar contra la naturaleza: contra la insalubridad, que estaba aniquilando la raza llanera, contra la inundación y la sequía, que se disputan la tierra todo el año, contra el desierto, que no deja penetrar la civilización.

> As he journeyed through the deserted plains, he fell to turning over the possibilities in his mind: to take possession of his ranch and fight back at his enemies; to defend his own and others' rights that were being trampled upon by the caciques of the plains, for dona Barbara was only one of many; to fight against the ill-health that was wiping out the plainsmen, against the floods and droughts that disputed possession of the land all the year, against the desert that was refusing to allow civilization to penetrate it.

Luzardo is torn between conflicting instincts: to leave what is hateful and repulsive to him, to sell

Altamira and bequeath its problems to someone else, or consagrarse a la obra patriótica, a la lucha contra el mal imperante, contra la Naturaleza y el hombre, 'to consecrate himself to the patriotic task, to the struggle against rampant evil, against Nature and man.' The plains are semi-barbaric, tierra de los hombres machos, 'territory of the aggressive male', and of ese exagerado sentimiento de la hombría producido por el simple hecho de ir a caballo a través de la sabana inmensa, 'that exaggerated sense of male-ness, produced by the simple fact of bestriding a horse across the immense plains.'

On the other hand, there is doña Bárbara herself, who lends her name to the novel's title. As Carmelito, Santos' peon, dryly observes: esa mujer es de pelo en pecho, como tienen que serlo todos los que pretendan hacerse respetar en esta tierra, 'that woman has hair on her chest, as everyone must who hopes to be respected in these parts.' Troubled offspring of indian and white,

frustrated in her early hopes of love with the young Asdrubal, and progressively brutalized by the men with whom she came in contact, doña Bárbara henceforth is a hater of men. Whatever we may think of the psychological portrait of Barbara - a trifle sentimental, perhaps, - Gallegos clearly wishes us to see her as an embodiment, a personification, of the land itself, that is the destroyer of men. Lorenzo Barquero, a man stript of property and dignity by Barbara, is a cultivated and civilized man reduced to a drunken shambles of his previous self who proclaims Barbara to be the incarnation of the principle of negation of the plains. Like the plains from which she has sprung, she is a man-eater, and now bent upon destroying Luzardo:

> Esta tierra no perdona. Tú también has oído ya la llamada de la devoradora de hombres. Ya te veré caer en sus brazos ... !La llanura! !La maldita llanura, devoradora de hombres!
>
> This land does not forgive. You too have already heard the call of the man-eater. Now I shall see you fall into her arms .... The plains! The cursed plains, the devourer of men!

Santos immediately provides us with an interpretation of Lorenzo's cry:

> Realmente, más que a las seducciones de la famosa doña Bárbara, este infeliz ha sucumbido a la acción embrutecedora del desierto.
>
> This unhappy man has in fact succumbed to the brutalizing action of the desert rather than to the seductions of the famous dona Barbara.

Ard here we are again, right back to the familiar thesis of essentially city-based men looking at and interpreting the interior: the land exerts a negative force upon men and encompases their moral collapse. The land, untamed and vast, excites horror and repulsion. The breed of unprincipled men who inhabit it are proof of the thesis. The fear the city man experiences is not altogether surprising: the frontiers experience invariably generates a tension between town and city, since the latter usually depends upon the former for its existence: there is therefore an underlying economic antagonism to give

good cause for the antipathy. In the city's view, the land must be tamed, and its people must be subject to the control of law and the exercise of virtues that stem from the city. In the background of the writer's mind lies the experience and example of Europe, where the land lies tame and submissive to civilized control.

And yet, here too is that ambivalence of attitude to the land that has characterised man from time immemorial. On the one hand, the land is brutalizing, reducing the moral stature of man, and frequently encompassing his physical ruin too:

> Ya Lorenzo había sucumbido, víctima de la devoradora de hombres, que no fue quiza tanto doña Bárbara cuanto la tierra implacable, la tierra brava, con su soledad embrutecedora, tremendal donde se había encenagado aquel que fue orgullo de los Barqueros, y ya él también había comenzado a hundirse en aquel tremendal de la barbarie que no perdona a quienes se arrojan a ella.
>
> Already Lorenzo had succumbed, victim of the man-eater which, perhaps, was not so much dona Barbara as the implacable land, the rough earth, with its

> brutalizing solitude, a quick-sand in which Lorenzo, pride of the Barqueros, was embogged, and in which he too had begun to sink, the quicksands of barbarism that show mercy to no one who casts himself into her.

It is a land that both in itself and in its product is antagonistic to civilized man. In emotive language that reveals the city man's horror of the interior, Gallegos describes the sinister wild life that lies in wait to entrap the unwary intruder:

> el rumor de las precipitadas zabullidas de los caimanes que dormitan al sol de las desiertas playas, dueños terribles del ancho, mudo y solitario río. Por estos ríos llaneros, cuando se abandona la orilla, hay que salir siempre con Dios. Son muchos los peligros de trambucarse ... Porque el caiman acecha sin que se le vea ni el aguaje, y el temblador y la raya están siempre a la parada, y el cardumen de los zamuritos y de los caribes, que dejan a un cristiano en los puros huesos, antes de que se puedan nombrar las Tres Divinas Personas.

> the sound of the sudden splashes of the crocodiles that sleep in the sun on the deserted banks, terrible lords of the wide, silent and solitary river. Whenever you leave the banks along these river of the plains, you take your life in your hands. There are many perils to be met ... For the crocodile lies in wait without betraying a ripple, and the shaker and the ray are always around, and the shoals of zamuritos and caribes, that will strip a Christian man to the bare bones before you can say the names of the blessed Trinity.

The fear is an exaggerated one: the exotic fauna is rarely so immediately and continuously in evidence as the writer suggests, but it does exist, and it is a threat. And so vast and all-embracing is the land that the prospect of bringing it under control seems remote.

But on the other hand the land wears another aspect too. It has its more salubrious side, and is abierta a toda acción mejoradora, 'open to healthy change'. Santos finds a beauty and peace in its vastness (another topos of the literature of the great open spaces) and in his own faithful peones evidence of plainsmen integrity. There is a clear echo of the bucolic idyll in the following lyrical passage:

> El hermoso espectáculo de la caída de la tarde sobre la muda inmensidad de la sabana; el buen abrigo, sombra y frescura, del rústico techo que lo cobijaba; la tímida presencia de las muchachas que habían estado esperándolo toda la tarde, vestidas de limpio y adornadas las cabezas con flores sabaneras, como para una fiesta; la emocionada alegría del viejo al comprobar que no lo había olvidado el

"niño Santos", y la noble discreción de la lealtad resentida de Antonio, estaban diciéndole que no todo era malo y hostil en la llanura, tierra irredenta donde una raza buena ama, sufre y espera.

The beateous spectacle of the sun setting upon the dumb immensity of the prairies; the goodly shelter, shade and freshness of the rustic roof overhead; the presence of the timid girls who had been waiting all the afternoon, freshly dressed and their heads adorned with flowers of the prairies, as for a fiesta; the deep joy of the old man upon discovering that 'little Santos' had not forgotten him, and the noble, but resented, loyalty of Antonio, were telling him that not all was bad and hostile in the prairies, a land unredeemed, where a fine race was loving, suffering and waiting.

It is this aspect of the land that reawakens in Santos sentiments born in him and that, despite ealier indications to the contrary, city life has not been able to eliminate in him. If the sunset on the prairies can stir his emotions, the sunrise can issue in illumination, in a sense of his true identity with the land that has given birth to him. The dawn breaks rapidly, the morning breeze stirs, with the suggestion of cattle scents upon it, hens begin to move and partidges to whistle in the grass; the American thrush breaks into

a 'silver trill', parakeets fly over in noisy flocks, and white herons stand silently by,

> Y bajo la salvaje algarabía de las aves que doran sus alas en la tierna luz del amanecer , sobre la ancha tierra por donde ya se dispersan los rebaños bravíos y galopan las yeguadas cerriles saludando al día con el clarín del relincho, palpita con un ritmo amplio y poderoso la vida libre y recia de la llanura. Santos Luzardo contempla el espectáculo desde el corredor de la casa y siente que en lo íntimo de su ser olvidados sentimientos se le ponen al acorde de aquel bárbaro ritmo.

> And under the wild bustling of the birds that were tipping their wings with gold in the tender light of the morning; on the wide earth over which strong herds were already dispersing, and over which the untamed stud mares galloped, greeting the day with trumpeting whinnies, the free and vigorous life of the prairies beat with a grand and powerful rhythm. Santos contemplated the spectacle from the corredor of the house and felt in the depths of his being forgotten sentiments putting him in harmony with that barbarous rhythm.

The day's work over, the ranch settles down for its evening mean and relaxation. Man's other persona - that of the poet and singer - finds its natural expression, his muse none other than the land he treads, la musa ingenua y chispeante del hombre en contacto con

la naturaleza, 'the unfeigned and sparkling muse of the man in contact with Nature.'

The two worlds and the two attitudes co-exist: a spoiled Eden in which the serpent stirs. The solution to the dilemma will be found in a fusion of the rustic and the urban virtues: Santos Luzardo (Holy Illumination) finds his deeper needs, unmet by the city, fulfilled in the country, his manhood proved by the sturdy trials that the life of the land imposes upon him, especially

> ¡La doma! La prueba máxima de llanería, la demostración de valor y de destreza que aquellos hombres esperaban ... Antonio sonrió, complacido en no haberse equivocado respecto a la hombría del amo.
>
> Horse-breaking! The greatest test of cowboy skill, the proof of the bravery and skill that those men were looking for ... Antonio smiled, happy at not having deceived himself with respect to the manhood of his master.

Santos' intention to put the yoke of civiliza-

tion upon the interior begins to see fulfilment after the game of wits between himself and doña Bárbara is played out. The rule of law prevails by la cerca... plan civilizador, 'the enclosure...instrument of civilization' (so lamented by Guiraldes!). The centaur, half man and half horse, the positive and negative qualities in human nature, and more particularly civilization versus barbarism, 'that which', as Lorenzo Barquero laments, 'all we men of the prairies carry within us', must be slain and a new integrated man raised up.

Doña Bárbara (the uncivilized barbarian) suffers defeat, and her grip on the life of the interior is destroyed, is indeed surrendered voluntarily in this novel as a consequence of her love for Santos Luzardo. But, like Don Segundo Sombra (of which she is the negative counterpart), she must disappear from the scene, leaving only the notoriety of her name behind. But the

challenge of the land does not disappear; that remains as a perpetual test of manhood and endurance, a measure of man's stature and daring:

> Es la vida hermosa y fuerte de los grandes ríos y las sabanas inmensas, por donde el hombre va siempre cantando entre el peligro. Es la epopeya misma. El llano bárbaro, bajo su aspecto más imponente: el invierno, que exige mas paciencia y mas audacia, la inundación, que centiplica los riesgos y hace sentir la enormidad del desierto; pero también la enormidad del hombre cuando, no pudiendo esperar nada de nadie, está resuelto a afrontarlo todo.

> The life of the great rivers and immense prairies through which man passes, always singing in the midst of peril, is fine and tough. It is epic itself. The barbarous land under its most imposing aspect: winter, that demands most patience and audacity, the floods that multiply the risks of the deserts a hundredfold, and make one sense the enormity of the desert; but the enormity also of man, who, being able to expect nothing of anyone, is resolved to face everything.

The final ideal, then, is the man cast in the heroic mold, the stuff of which epic is made, the man, along Nietzchean lines, controlling his passions and realizing a noble destiny by imposing his civilized will upon his life and environment.

Chapter 6

K.S. Prichard
A Darwinian View of Man and the Earth

K.S.Prichard's characters are direct products of the land, and deeply attuned to it: they are what the land and the manner of life it imposes upon them makes them. Red Burke, of Working Bullocks (1926), is a land hero, splendid and virile, like the earth that spawned him. In language irresistibly reminscent of D.H.Lawrence, (who was inclined to see his characters in terms of vital animal forces, and to describe them in strongly physico-erotic prose), KSP makes Mrs. Colburn reflect on the appearance of Red Burke; she wonders

> how she could disapprove of Red Burke as he stood before her. Moleskins, worn as old leather, were tight on his thighs, leggings strapped the broad, hard shape of his calves. A grey flannel shirt, heavy with grease and dust, showed his breast the dark red of oiled jarrals. The arm grasping the long-handled whip, sleeve torn from it, bare to the arms pits, red and brown with sun-burn, glint of fire in the hair on it, muscles and sinews strung out, flung out its challenge.

'A powerful brute, Mary Anne Colburn conceded.' It is not that he is simply a physically strong fellow, period. He is part of an integrated vision: the man and his environment are a single expression of the same force, for man and beast are similarly seen as separate expressions of the same thing:

> Sunlight blazed on the bullocky too, as he came from the gloom of the trees, striding out beside the team, whirling his whip. Thick trunk, well-slung limbs, broad shoulders, it gave the strength of the man who was like his bullocks, the rhythm of his moving arms and body, as it swayed from the midriff.

'He was like one of his bullocks, rooted in deep natural instincts.' Yet this man has sprung from the superfluous urban prole of England. His metamorphosis bestows a rustic dignity upon him. The new Australian man and his environment have become one. Gone is the awkward, unskilled creature of Eleanor Dark's chronicle; in his place is the new homo australis, more a product of environment than of heredity. KSP's habit of seeing

man and his environment as one is consistent. Tom Colburn, lying beside a dead tree trunk, 'might have been a branch of it in his worn white moleskins and washed out shirt.' Nil Hanson, champion axe-man, is similarly sketched:

> Broad shouldered, heavy limbed, arms and massive neck, ruddy brown of oiled wood showing above the thin cotton of his white singlet, thighs sloping into the coarse blue serge of his trousers, he stood to talk for a moment with the grace and poise of a tree.

Functionally important though this is to KSP's vision of her characters and their world, it is in danger of becoming irritatingly mannered. It is the bucolic idyll again, the vision of man and nature in harmony, a pioneering arcadia almost realized; a beautiful and sturdy rustic race sprung from inauspicious beginnings. But it is also, of course, an indication that the Australian literary artist has developed a vision of the Australian landscape that is no longer conditioned

by memories of the European scene, that is capable of giving voice to an inhering beauty that he has learned to see. Mark Smith thus becomes especially the voice of the author herself:

> The life of the place and its people had gone deep into him. He loved in the hungry, yearning way of a mother, the raw beauty of this world of trees and the men and women who grew in it like the trees with a quality as rough fresh and clear to the eyes.

The contrast with the earlier colonial situation seen through Eleanor Dark's eyes is complete: 'Again the land was enigmatic and they themselves aliens in it, having no right, no place in its intimidating immensity of silence'. (The Timeless Land)

KSP is as passionately romantic, in the nineteenth century sense of that word, as any of the English nature poets: neo-platonist and pantheist influences stand out unmistakeably and are continuously present in

her novels. The interesting thing about this - for the sentiments are far from novel, constituting literary topoi for many centuries in the literature of western man - apart from its obvious interest as a psychic phenomenon, is that it is the antipodean encounter with the land that has inspired it, and that it is at times expressed with a descriptive power that captures the vigour and intensity of the life-force itself. Wordsworthian and other influences are there, but in an altogether other artistic key. Listen to Deb Colburn:

> As the team splashed along shining threads of the track, she looked away into distances of the leaves, millions, millions and millions of them massed together. The systems of their lives fused, dark and purpling in the distance, fountains of green fire and sunlight where the track struck them. Deb knew nothing of ancient philosophies; but she had a sense of being close to the life about her, a knowledge of oneness with it, profound and serene. She could not have put it into words, but the feeling was like a benediction. The great trees with their power, the flame of their lives, the fate they were moving towards, she was akin to them; and to the earth, sombre and fecund, thrusting forests from her deep soil, holding them in the air through all the years.

But what most stands out in her vision of pioneering people and the world in which they are set is force - something such as Dylan Thomas has in mind when he speaks of the force in man and plant that drives life through its courses, and to determined ends.

KSP's novels of the land always have a love story as the frame upon which the tale is woven, and Working Bullocks is no exception; but what sets her aside as unique among Australian writers is her concept of love as a kind of telluric force. Siegmund Freud and Charles Darwin and D.H.Lawrence would appear to be her literary influences (although she has denied that her view of sex as the mainspring of action in her novels is much influenced by Lawrence). The sex drive is clearly seen as fundamental in the determining of relationships, yet it does not stand apart, operating as some deus ex machina: it is one with the life force that flows from the earth into all living things. Thus

sex is not primarily social, and therefore it cannot adequately be described in the language of the courtly convention. She comes, indeed, very close to Lawrence in seeing sex as animal and instinctive:

> When he took a mate [Red tells himself] he would bite her flanks and she would spring to his passion, cry with delight as he held her. And she would be a woman like this girl, strong with animal instincts.

If there is any sense of incongruity in a lover thinking of his girl in a way that is not much different from that in which he speaks of his horse, it is an incongruity imposed upon us by the courtly tradition. In a Darwinian world, in a world accustomed to the naturalist novel, the incongruity disappears. Red sees the wild stallion and, full of exultation, claims it: 'Your'e mine! You're mine if every a brumby was ... you're mine boy', words soon to be echoed when he claims Deb: 'You're mine ... you're mine, my girl - and don't

you forget it.'

But she transcends Lawrence in adding a further dimension - that of the continually thrusting life-force of the earth beneath:

> When he found her loading sleepers with her father Red had exclaimed to himself that this was a fine lump of a girl. As Deb stood in the cart, her old blue dress tied about her with a piece of rope, he had looked at her very much as he would have at a young horse or steer. Her limbs were weathered brown of tree and branches, muscles hard in them ... her eyes were still the beautiful dark eyes of a young animal. She was unconscious of herself, Deb, Red realised, as he had been unconscious of her, until that day when she went to sleep in the forest. Then it seemed, he had felt her, a force flowing, silent and serene, beside him. She might have been a tree growing, or a spring welling, deeply, quietly, underground.

The earth, the air, and the flora and fauna, are suffused with the same life-force. Red and Deb are lying in the forest (she, again typically, is seen by him as though she were 'a young tree fallen'); Red becomes aware of the multiform, throbbing, ticking earth under them:

> There was a faint dry ticking as if the pulse of every living thing in the forest was vibrating. Life might be suspended; yet Red heard that ticking, the rattle of frail shells, innumerable, infinitesimal insect castanets clicking, as an assurance that the transfixed world about him was not the world of a dream. He could almost hear the sap flowing in the trees, electric currents circulating among the roots of the plants; the soil stir and move to its nitrogen, potassium and phosphates. The air he breathed was undulating with rarified elixirs. He seemed to be drifting away on the absorbing and subtle magnetisms of the air, the earth, the insects and trees.

Inasmuch, therefore, as Working Bullocks is to be seen as a novel of the land, its intention is to depict the issue of the European transplant, to see a new breed, a white indigene, manifesting the same kind of unity with the land that has hitherto been reserved for the aboriginal alone; the doctrine of Natural Selection is made explicit. Thus the land theme is not merely important to Working Bullocks: it is crucial.

Universally, however, the novelist is prone to see the establishment of European man upon new continents as a disaster for indigenous peoples everywhere, including those in Australia. (Only here has a deliberate

act of genocide been totally successful, as it was in Tasmania.) Invariably, too, the European colonial is stricken with an uneasy conscience over his, or his forebears', treatment of native peoples, and not surprisingly the theme repeatedly emerges as social comment in the novel.

KSP's Coonardoo must unquestionably rank as the most moving and eloquent treatment to date of the consequences of the European-Aboriginal encounter, since its central theme is that of relations between white men and black women. Eleanor Dark has Governor Phillip speculating over the prospect of moral compromise, of a new land demanding a new set of values. KSP presents her readers with a case history in which the central dilemma is that of an Australian pastoralist who cannot compromise, and is thus destroyed. And yet the book also belongs intimately to the genre which I have generally dubbed 'novel of the land', in that one of its central

concerns, perhaps the central concern, is to interpret the experience of the 'new' Australian in his adaptation to a new soil.

The outback breeds a new, craggy, resourceful type who has learned to survive the caprices of an unreliable land. In the process, of course, refined city characteristics necessarily fall away; indeed, the city type is invariably viewed as an inferior being, one who can survive easily because the life-challenge is not great (another of the literary topoi).

In Coonardoo (1929) it is the women who afford the strongest contrasts of opposites. Mrs. Bessie, the woman-master of Wytaliba, undertakes the running of the station alone after the death of her husband. Tough and resolved, she is another archetype of the breed of outback women who impose themselves on their surroundings, and who have developed a fierce love for them, refusing

to abandon them through the hard years of drought, knowing the rhythms of the land, knowing the good days will return. The personal cost to her femininity is a great one: she becomes a co-labourer and a 'mate' to her husband in the peculiarly Australian sense of that word. There is no room for a softy, like the unfortunate Jessica whom Hugh has brought to his mother. She can see at once that the girl is no good for her son, that she stands no chance of surviving the rigours of a woman's life in the outback:

> It's a man's country... and you're a man, Hugh, not a boy any longer ... Look at all the men up here, married women down south who don't like the Nor-west ... Won't live in it. What sort of life have they got? If I could've found a woman for you before I left, Hughie - a woman like Jim Ryland's wife will face hardship with a man, stand by and fight through with him.

Mrs. Bessie corresponds admirably to the kind of woman she would like for Hugh, for this is the pattern her own life has followed. Her will alone holds

Wytaliba together, and that will never falters, not even in the face of death, scorning to abandon the station to die in the comforts of the city hospital, resolved to 'see it out up here'. She prefers to 'die like an old gin, under a tree', and does, because her attachment to the land she has fought for is so strong:

> Bare and hard the life was; but Mrs. Bessie loved every phase of it, every line of the trees, every light and colour of red earth and pale-blue sky, dove-grey mulga, and white-barked creek gum-trees with their long dark pointed leaves.

Not surprisingly, Hugh absorbs his mother's values, and we know from the start that the prissy Jessica does not stand a chance, stepping daintily round the stockyards in her white muslin frock, her white shoes, and holding a pink silk sunshade over her head. Here it is the land and its care that must come first, not a man's woman, an idea to which Jessica can never submit. There is a down-to-earth primitiveness

about the life of the land that can admit of no effete romanticising. Relationships are forged from the demands of the life. In Hugh's case this was to be true of the girl he eventually marries as it had been of his mother. As Mrs. Besie lies in her death agony, we read:

> Hugh sat watching her frail, withered face against the pillows, going over the long, fighting trail of her life as far as he knew it. His feeling was very little a son's for a mother, but a man's for his workmate, or comrade in arms. He had scarcely any sentimental tenderness or personal affection for her, but a passionate admiration and sense of physical need.

It was going to be the same way with Mollie. The 'romantic' elements in Hugh's nature have not developed; his environment on the station was, we are to understand, not propitious for such a development. Mrs. Bessie has already divorced 'love' from 'sex': 'Sex hunger's like any other. Satisfy it and you don't think about it .. work's the thing, not sex.' As far as Mollie is

concerned Hugh is not 'gone on her', not 'wild about her'. 'I want a wife', he had said, 'a good sensible girl like you, Mollie, to come and be mates with me out there.' That Mollie is not up to the test of the life is scarcely any fault of her's, but it is a fact that Hugh finds difficult to accept. Clearly she is not of the calibre of Mrs. Withnell, the pioneer woman of the Nor-West, who had brought up a large family on a lonely station, without sight of another white woman for years at a time. Hugh had hoped Mollie would be of that stuff:

> He found it difficult to forgive Mollie for not playing the game better, standing up to the drought, heat and hardships everybody else was fighting with such grit and good humour. It went to prove what Sam Geary was always talking about, the weakness and unfitness of white women for the hard and lonely life of the Nor-West.

For Mollie the experience is disastrous. Repeated child-bearing, the isolation of the life, and the realisation that a man belongs to the land rather than to his woman is an unpalatable fact that she cannot accommodate her-

self to, and leads inevitably to her breakdown and departure from Wytaliba.

Such is the grilling test of womanhood in the outback, and it is not surprising that there are few women around, and not surprising either that the land therefore forces a compromise with, amongst other things, sexual standards. For some, for those like Sam Geary, this poses no real problem: the absence of white women may be made up for with gins, aboriginal women. But there is another species of Anglo-Saxon man who, despite his successful battle with the soil and adaptation to the land, retains intact his racial prejudices. Mrs. Bessie has injected Hugh with her own paternalist attitudes towards the aboriginals: her one horror is that he should reach an accommodation with a gin. Respect, kindness, and fair treatment are in order, but sexual connexion represents, for those of her view, a final severence with civilized man's conventions, a kind of ultimate betrayal of oneself.

KSP is clearly concerned to argue the hollowness of this thinking. Coonardoo holds our sympathy, Hugh does not. No doubt the pejorative epithets in the mouths of certain characters in the novel reflect some typical Australian attitudes to their aborigines: 'The abos are filthy and treacherous' (Mollie); 'Mrs. Bessie had fits of loathing for the blacks'; "Cripes! "Bill exclaimed irritably, "A man doesn't love a gin, not a white man" (Billy Gale); even Saul Hardy, who argues strongly in the aboriginals' favour, confesses to a cultural prejudice; 'I don't like'em. Never did ... I don't know why. It's just being different, I suppose.'

But KSP, without idealising the native, provides the natural corrective to these views in her portraiture of Coonardoo and her tribe, whose moral superiority is in marked contrast to the supposed biological superiority of the white man. At least the black man's life moves integrally, and is not at war with itself. In Coonardoo Hugh senses a possible mate, he comes closer to love with her than he does with his white women, but he will never allow the thought to develop. He has his mother's shame and distaste for white

men 'mucking around with gins', and so pretends to himself that his regard for Coonardoo is a 'relic of their old playmateship, his admiration for her horsemanship. Every finer, less reasonable instinct he had stamped on, kicked out of his consciousness.'

The psychological portrait of Hugh is a convincing one: that of a man at odds with himself, an increasingly tragic figure, obstinately repressing his true feelings in response to a racial preconception - 'no stud gins for him, he'll marry white and stick white, come what may.' Yet Nature, and the law of life, seem to dictate another course:

> She was like his own soul riding there, dark and passionate and childlike. In all this wide empty world Coonardoo was the only living thing he could speak to, Hugh knew; the only creature who understood what he was feeling, and was feeling for him. Yet he was afraid of her, resented a secret understanding between them.

Haunted by the vision of degraded blacks on other stations, by the scandalously degenerate Sam Geary, whose gins live with him in open concubinage on the neighbouring station, and nurtured in his mother's condescendingly paternal attitude

towards the blacks, Hugh is victim to the vital principle that 'a homogeneous society, racially and socially, could not tolerate challenges to its purity' (55). The colonial need for land had, as Rosecrantz argues, forced the separation of European from indigene, for the life of the dispossessed race had little significance apart from the land. To be landless employees did not suit them (56), and it further reduced their respect in the eyes of Europeans. Egalitarian though Australian society was, and is, in so many ways, the strength of European cultural conditioning will not permit Hugh to act independently of his culture in the matter of sexual, or more particularly of marriage mores. The persistent influence of such conditioning is remarkable, for even in Spanish-America, where massive miscegenation has taken place (possible only because of the massive absence of female migrants from Europe, and also, possibly, because of the already existing admixture of Moorish with Spanish blood, resulting in a reduced consciousness of colour differences), the casta and indignee population

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(55) L. Hartz. The Founding of New Societies. p.302, Harcourt Bruce & World Inc. N.Y. 1964

(56) ibid.

is still found at the lower end of the social scale, and a white creole aristocracy, strongly conscious of its limpieza de sangre, racial purity, enjoys a social and racial ascendancy. The South American indigene has been able to survive the European presence through shear strength of numbers; it is the Australian aborigine's misfortune that his numbers, estimated at 250,000 at the time of the first European settlers, and reduced to 50,000 (full bloods) by 1969 (57), were not enough to withstand either the introduction of diseases from Europe that decimated the population, or the punitive expeditions mounted against him from the coastal towns.

KSP is therefore right to dwell upon the idea of violation in the racial encounter. Coonardoo, used, violated and dishonoured by Hugh, is thus the racial encounter in microcosm, and though the white man is rapidly being assimilated

(57) Davies and Encel, Australian Society, p.363, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1970.

to his new land, he seems oddly out of place when viewed alongside the primaeval race. Mrs. Bessie and her menage as yet hold only a tentative place in the scheme of things: it is the indigene who is in true contact with the land, whose relationship is an integrated totality. Warieda easily tames a horse because he has a closer and more intimate relationship with the earth and its children:

> At last, arresting, magnetic, with a greeting, like a brumby boss, head thrown back, eyes challenging the wild eyes before him, his own as wild and bright, Warieda went up to the horse, his arm, the dark sinewy arm of a black that was like the branch of a tree, stretched out before him. Imperious, irresistible, he approached, something swaggering, gallant, of a triumphant lover, in his attitude. His hand going straight to brain communicated the spell of the man, in language of the flesh, an old forgotten flow of instincts. Warieda was nearer to the horse than any of the white men about him. Handsome, aboriginal as he was, that was perhaps the secret of his power.

We may dismiss this as romance, or agree that it stems from the fact of the black man's long and uninterrupted familiarity with the land. What seems certain is that KSP reveals that same fascination with primitiveness, with man living in close mystical harmony with the earth, that has always fascinated

city man. Whether this preceded her attraction to Marxian socialism (I think it did), or followed it, is not a matter of great importance. Certainly the cast of mind that tends to idealize the man of the soil would find itself at home with a social theory that idealized the peasant or the working man and espouses his values. At any rate, KSP's origins are urban rather than rural; her strongest rural impressions were youthful ones gained when, at nineteen years of age, she went into the back country to act as a governess, first to a doctor's children in Victoria (one year), and then as a governess on a New South Wales station (one year). She confesses to having gained a great deal in her apprenticeship to life and literature on these occasions, and returned home full of her experiences of 'mustering, shearing, horsebreaking, the great inland country; seeing camel trains strung out across the horizon, mobs of bullocks with their drivers, at dawn, making for Broken Hill on the long track from Queensland'; 'With joyous enthusiasm I had absorbed those sights and scenes, bringing me nearer to an

understanding of theimmensity, and strange differences in the land and its people, which go to make up Australia.' (58) She shows the same fascination for the primitive land when she visits England, and shares the reaction of the Romantic writers on Nature, 'always quoting Keats, Meredith, Browning and Wordsworth, thrilled by the sights and sounds of the English countrywide.' (59) Her distaste for the town is that which is apt to develop in the town-bred individual and intellectual, and expresses the sense of relief that the urban dweller feels upon effecting his escape:

> He knew he was moving out and away from the town with its scattered and ramshackle houses, its sweltering iron sheds and seething human beings. A noisome growth it seemed to him, on the edge of the sea, like those fungi which melt away in stink and slime. As they rode on, there was only the wide empty country, grey fur of the trees stretching endlessly, hills lumped and undulating against a fading silky spaciousness, blue, fine and pure. Smell of the earth was good, heat of the sun, the clean brazen gleam on polished pebbles, taste of the red dust rising in mist from the horses' feet.

Fine, pure, good, clean, as opposed to sweltering

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(58) K.S. Prichard, Child of the Hurricane, p.88, Angus & Robertson London, 1963.
(59) ibid. p.87.

seething, noisome, stink, and slime: the dichotomy is precise and the immemorial echoes unmistakeable. For Hugh, as for KSP, Coonardoo is 'something primitive, fundamental, nearer than he to the source of things.'

Chapter 7

Brian Penton:
Telluric Imperatives in the pioneering era

There is an aggressiveness about the title Landtakers (1934) that perfectly reflects Penton's vision of the early Australian pioneers and squatters who broke from the Australian littoral regions and thrust determinedly inland in search of land and fortune. They took by right presumptive of explorer-settlers, and set themselves to hold the conquered territory against all the fierce resistance of its climatic resources. The battle was won: the land was indeed taken, but the personal cost to the earliest of the pioneers was a heavy one indeed. Droughts, floods, fire, and storm, cruel distances stretching to the far horizons and beyond, the lonely isolation, and physical exhaustion of the life, dust, rats, ants, snakes and mud, the bitter feuds over land titles - all are eventually overcome, or weathered at least. The cost is half a lifetime of withering toil, and a physical and spiritual metamorphosis that leaves the

pioneer only half convinced of the worthwhileness of it all. For Penton's pioneers belong to the expendable first generation or two of nation-builders. In language superbly commanded for the purpose, Penton makes the age live again in its unromanticised cruelty and vigour, memorably opposing civilised man in Cabell, to the other principal protagonist, the untamed land. Hence the title, 'Land takers' both defines the theme and suggests the novelist's attitude to his subject.

Derek Cabell is a new arrival in the Morteon Bay Penal Settlement. He means to make a fortune, and get out. The quality of life is brutally different from Owerbury Hall in England and the polite society that he has left. The new land can scarcely be said to be breeding a noble new race of men; its demands are too elementary to inspire the civilised virtues. Indeed, quite the reverse. The early Australia of Penton's vision is brutal, cynical and corrupt, its inhabitants drunken sots.

It might be claimed that in his eagerness to 'demythologize' the history of Australian origins, Penton has been betrayed into a compensatory exaggeration that substitutes an equally false counter-myth - and it must be conceded that there is some justice in the accusation. Yet one cannot escape the conviction that despite the overstatement a thread of shrewd historical perception informs his narrative. We have only to turn from Penton to Prichard to see that in the latter (Working Bullocks) we are face to face with a lyrical interpretation of the white man in Australia, in which the author writes in obedience to a unified vision that sees man as the blessed, wholesome product of a fruitful soil. Penton, however, I believe, is on firmer ground in seeing the pioneering experience as, at first, a necessarily 'brutalising' experience - and in this he enjoys the support of important novelists of Spanish America. If he is betrayed by this imperative into overstatement, this does not invalidate his thesis, although it may reduce the effectiveness of his statement. It is a question, I think, of realist versus romantic, and both may claim to have an important sight of

the truth. But Penton, probably better than any other Australian novelist, catches the essential roughness of the incipient colonial society:

> Cabell hesitated in the doorway, repelled, as always, by the faces which turned to look at them. Whatever had been there of friendliness, forbearance and common human decency, life had scored out with her crudest die. The skin hung to their skulls like shrunk leather, their eyes had retreated into deep sockets and were calculating and suspicious; their lips pressed tightly together so that no colour showed. Their harsh voices, their ungracious gestures, their watchfulness uncovered for him suddenly the surface of a life in which men had not yet made the social contract that softens the brutality of 'everyone for himself'.

It is a life in which hardship and death are commonplace. The heartless cruelty of the convict system is matched by the impassive cruelty of the new and dangerous environment. Immediately after hearing of the cruelty of man to man (he hears with horror the case of a woman who has had her convict husband assigned to her as a servant, only to take him in regularly once a month for fifty lashes on his bare back), Cabell hears of the unfortunate man pinioned by a falling trunk in a bush fire and burnt in half, 'Head and shoulders here, legs there, heap of ashes in between. Clean as a whistle'.

He is filled with terror at the country in which such things can happen without inspiring horror in its people; the people are alien to him, and he feels an alien in an alien land: 'I loathe it. It's so different from England, this eternal, cursed, colourless bush.' Peppiott, the old-timer, is no comfort: the land is malignant. 'You think it depends on you. But it doesn't. It'll just break you and change you and break you again. If you had the patience of fifty stone sphinxes you might see it through - or go mad.'

The grey land tempts, promises, witholds, gives and takes, all the time maliciously imprinting its own mark on the settlers, changing and molding them into physical caricatures of their former selves. Penton returns frequently to the theme of the physical and mental metamorphosis the settlers and convicts undergo in the southern land, and the change is not a pretty one, for in return for its wealth the land extracts a high price:

> Settling it was quite a different matter from settling Africa and America. The story is not at all the same. There was nothing spectacular in the country to break the dead monotony and loneliness of the life - no tigers, as Peppiott put it. A man just had to learn to wait - or go mad.

> Really all these early settlers were just slightly off the hinges: not, as one generally conceives them, simple people, simple honest backwoodsmen. Loneliness, ennui and impatience took strange psychological shapes in them! And they were not ordinary men. The time and the circumstances bred enormous hatreds, enormous greeds, and their struggles with the incredible land, even allowing that the romantic mists of time magnify things, were sage-like.

Cabell is no exception to the rule. He looks with horror on the coarse race of men he sees, swearing he'll cut his throat rather than be like them. In this respect particularly, Penton seems to complement what we know of the attitudes of gentleman colonists: they <u>did</u> look with distaste upon the crudities of colonial life, and they <u>did</u> identify with the mother-country rather than with the new Australia. Some were successful enough and able to maintain their distance; others, of more slender means and lesser fortune, found the going much harder and were obliged to pay the price - and it is this aspect of colonial life that Penton illuminates, albeit at the cost of a total vision. Personally, however, I find his relation of Cabell's adaptation to the new soil singularly convincing. Remorselessly, over the twenty years of his outback labour, the physical and mental changes possess Cabell. He is deftly

sketched by Penton at the beginning of the book so that his physical decay may stand in clear relief:

> One sees Cabell's young English face against the background of the country, as it were. There is the full, sensual lower lip that was a family characteristic, the plump, olive cheeks, thrown up vividly by the blackness of the hair and the thick eyebrows. In the Byronic fashion of the period the hair falls into a curling sidelever on each cheek. There is something dandified about this that seems out of place in the businesslike clothes and side by side with the ragged beard and roughly shorn hair of his companion; deliberately, defiantly dandified.

At first the change is subtle, 'sensed rather than seen'. There's a note of arrogance and contempt in his voice, and a slight flattening of the features. As yet he has not faced the direct struggle with the land, only the coarsening association with the superintendent McGovern; but once having established himself on the homestead of Murrumburra, the real trial begins, and he loses in one week much of the fruit of a year's labour through the raids of the blacks:

> Short-handed, harassed, overworked, the men could not drive them (the beasts) out (of the scrub). Cabell, worn to a skeleton by fatigue and fever, refused to lay up as long as he had the strength to drag himself on to a horse.

It is the gruelling nature of the raw life of the outback that is to leave the most telling physical marks upon him. The contrast is effectively made all the time of his early immigrant condition and progressive decline:

> It was all a dream - blacks, stolen sheep, ambushes, murder, convicts, fever, mud, foot-rot, everything ... He slipped into a world more kindly and convincing. He was no longer dressed in clothes that stank of sweat and diseased animals. Soft linen touched his skin. His waistcoat, his cravat, his shining boots belonged to a man of fashionable and fastidious tastes ...
>
> He saw with horror and dismay, how far already the corrosive of this new life had eaten into him ... What suddenly assailed him, as a terrible revelation, was the discovery that Derek Cabell who was once as much a part of Owerbury as its quaint houses and walls, its trees and its hedges .. had been secretly and treacherously metamorphosed into a different being, a Derek Cabell who took his place in the crude life of a country of outcasts as naturally as any Carney or Curry among them. And if in so short a time he had come so far, what more appalling changes might come over him in the future?

Later, back in Moreton Bay on a visit, he becomes uncomfortably aware that 'the forces of the life he lived (had) remoulded him secretly and irresistibly to the same pattern. Already few observable differences distinguished him from these thin-lipped, skinny, narrow-eyed, lined faces.'

An entirely new colonial breed was developing, confident, narrow minded, impatient and hard, a people of a 'strange conglomerate likeness' extending even to the pitch of their voices and accents 'in which all trace of former refinement was lost'. Civilization loses out to a new colonial barbarism:

> Each of them had come here years before with illusions, hopes and standards like Cabell's and had shed them, reluctantly, unconsciously, as Cabell was doing, under the heels of a hard life. The result was a certain prickly feeling of moral inferiority and shame before one in whom the process was not yet completed, whose silence was criticism unspoken.

V. Moog remarks of South America that 'adventurers and persons of the lowest social status emigrated in great numbers but without setting the tone of the nascent society overseas.' (60) No doubt this was in part due to the large and ineradicable numbers of races considered even lower than the humblest Europeans, and who provided the raw material of a new society of serfs. In Australia, the emigrant, be he high or low, generally had to labour on his own account, with no reservoir of

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(60) The Founding of New Societies, p.128, op.cit.

indigenous slave labour, apart from the relatively short-lived assignation system, whereby convicts were assigned as labourers, which can in no way compare with the South-American encomiendá. Furthermore, Russel Ward has cogently argued the thesis that lower class and criminal values created an Australian ethos that was not swamped by later massive emigrati n of free settlers and diggers. The 'tone' was set by the lowest social class (61) - a view that corresponds with Penton's interpretation of the period.

R.N. Rosencrance has also argued that the pastoralists, of whom Cabell is one, the nearest thing to a landed gentry that developed in Australia, failed to figure in the national myth of Australia because they remained essentially alien to the bulk of the population and had their eyes nostalgically set upon England, which they regarded as 'home', and to

(61) The Australian Legend, Oxford University Press, 1966.

which they often aspired to return, failing which they would send their children home to be educated.(62)

Now Penton's hero is an upper class Englishman forever looking homeward. In his treatment of Cabell, Penton is showing the social mechanics of the metamorphosis that must often have been imposed, willy nilly. Only the most successful pastoralists, those well-cushioned with capital, could have remained immune to the levelling forces at work. Hence we have a penetrating insight into the lower class forces that bend Cabell into a new mental and physical shape: the aristocrat is remoulded in a debased pioneering image. It is a change in which the people and the earth forces together act upon him. Hadgraft, I think, misses the point here when, observing that Penton had set out to show '"What happened to a sensitive but strong personality thrown into conflict with an unpioneered country"',

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(62) The Founding of New Societies, p.289, op.cit.

goes on to remark, 'But it did not work out in quite that way. It is his striving against men and for a time his wife that makes Cabell at last what he is.' (63) But we should not forget that the kind of people against whom Cabell finds himself matched are themselves a projection of that environment: there before him, they are its proper children, part of the armoury that the land wields to vanquish Cabell. Other pioneers must be part of the challenge of an unpioneered country. Indeed, the convicts, the floggings, flooded rivers, unscaleable mountains, the monotonous bush, drought, blacks, bogs and bushfires all contribute to the shaping of Cabell, and in the first volume certainly it is the land itself that seems to take the major initiative in the assault upon Cabell. The land, indeed, operates upon all, and probably favours the establishment of an anti-aristocratic milieu. Of the two forces, however, the land is the most brutalising

(63) Australian Literature, p.238, Heinmann, London, 1960.

by virtue of the kind of demands, sacrifices and compromises it makes unavoidable.

In Cabell, the fear of physical degeneration is strong. Penton depicts him, victim of a raging toothache, fearful of plucking out the offending molar and of thus looking like 'them', minus his fine white teeth. The convict Gursey mocks him as, three days later, taking a pair of big pliers, he wrestles with the fiery molar,

> splintering his jaw and half choking himself with his blood. When he could bring himself to examine his teeth in the mirror he saw that, sure enough, they were no longer white but yellow, with dark lines under the gums. Some were loose. Yes, they were going. It was the sign and symbol of the decay that was eating away the life he guarded inside him, as the white ants ate away the great gum trees...

When the pathetic Colonel Darvall turns up, trying with great pretence to preserve the civilised usages in the Australian bush, Cabell takes malicious

satisfaction in disillusioning him:

> "The bush stays as it was when we came...No" - he bent his head and spat deliberately between his feet, like a stockman, enjoying with malicious satisfaction the look of surprise and disgust on the Colonel's face. - "It doesn't change, But we do... If I'd gone on scraping my chin as I started I'd still be changed. I've done things - ". He gestured. "Not gentlemanly things, Colonel. Not things your friend Bobo would approve of. And they're part of me." He pounded his chest again and his voice rose. "You'll do the same things and they'll become part of you, and change you. If you don't change you'll snap" - he broke a stick under the Colonel's nose - "like that. Then you'll cease to be an Englishman and a gentleman or you'll drink yourself to death - or go mad."

The colonel cannot change, and does go mad. But Cabell changes. In his thirty-seventh year he looks forty-seven, his face is scarred and wrinkled, and he talks through tightly clenched lips to hide a mouthful of bad teeth. He shows 'all the gruff characteristics of the national psyche that was then beginning to show itself.' Furthermore, he is prepared to acknowledge to himself, in moments at least, that he now belongs to the land. And the land has placed its mark ineradicably

upon him:

> In sixty-five years life seemed to have changed even the bones under the flesh. The nose, which in old Cabell was predatory, hooked, with splayed, enormous hairy nostils - a cruel beak - in the young man was straight, with a sensitive bridge and a delicate, womanish septum. The youth had a chin more rounded than otherwise, neither weak nor particularly strong, whereas the old man's jaw looked like three pieces of roughly cast iron clamped together and hinged under his ears on a huge bulge of muscle that swelled and relaxed continually as he sat thinking. The sensual lower lip, so prominent in the youth as to mark, one would have thought, a fundamental trait, had disappeared in the old man, whose tightly repressed mouth seemed to have no lips at all, giving him the air of Calvinistic severity. The only likeness between them was apparently this little trick of glancing anxiously and suspiciously sideways, so that you expected the door to open upon some horrible thing.

The psychological problems facing the settler were enormous. His sense of dislocation was complete. The old, familiar way of life in England was suddenly almost meaningless. Cabell yearns to return, longs with all his being to quit the land that is costing him so much in sweat and mental agony, and he rages and fumes at the constant frustration of his hopes of an early return. For the free settler the problem of adaptation

was greater than it was for the transportees, for whom in England it was 'all poverty and jails'. Indeed, in a kind of utopian fervour the transportees soon acquire a sense of possession that would exclude any others. The convict Gursey voices this view when he cries: 'But whose country is this, do you think? It's a beaten dog's country. That's what it is. It's full of beaten dogs, what with us lags and all the rest that come because they had to.' But for men of Cabell's kind the land is a means of restoring their slender resources, a land to be used, and left. That so many fail to leave is not for lack of the wish to do so, but that the land takes them and remakes them in its own image, unfitting them for return. Hate is piled on hate, as the unfriendly nature of the territory is forced home upon the settlers. The bush has no mercy:

> This was how the bush dealt with the weak and unfortunate: swallowed them up, devoured their

possessions, spread its weeds across their clearings, obliterated their tracks. For nineteen years it had been trying to do the same with him. Would it succeed?

The romantic notion of a kind and beneficent Nature is shattered by the harsh realities of his Australian experience. There is a passionate cri du coeur that Penton puts into Cabell's mouth that perfectly articulates the agony of frustration that the cruel land creates in those who would tame it:

Nature was not kind and pitiful. What an idea! In this country she hated men. She tried to starve them out, dry them out, burn them out. She'd had nineteen years of his life and what had she given him in return? Nothing. Literally nothing. The fortune on which he counted - was it his even yet? If he lost the appeal, if there was a drought and bushfires he would be no better off than when he first came. Not an iota. Why, he'd be worse off. He was thirty-nine, past the half-way mark of his life. What was left to him now, even with wealth, except old age? Where was the love of a beautiful, passionate woman he had always longed for? Where was his good name? Stolen from him by this land of sin, sweat, sorrow and treachery. What it had done to Gursey, the Darvalls and Rosa Bellamy it was trying to do to him. And every day it became more powerful, because every day it gained accomplices. Each spirit it broke became its accomplice, out of envy, malice and hatred of those who were not broken.

The injury sustained is personally felt and interpreted. The land is a personal antagonist bent upon destroying the presumptuous intruder. At one time it is drought, then floods that leave bullocks suspended in tree-tops, or bushfires that burn out areas bigger than England itself; lawyer vines that tear the clothes from a man's back, leaving festering sores; trees that sting; silence and heat. Small wonder the settler develops a sense of persecution, a sense that the land is personally resolved to destroy him:

> The face of the bush, for a fleeting second, became really a face, a woman's face with cruel, tight, virgin lips. He saw it staring at him on all sides, half sightless, half mocking. The sound of a voice shouting foul execrations brought him back to himself. He found himself staring at a knot on the trunk of an ironbark. It began to take the form of a face again. He covered his eyes with his cold hands, turned and fled.

Penton's picture of the pioneer days is a harsh, cruel one, of man locked in remorseless and unending struggle with a recalcitrant land. The growing

cities are, predictably, corrupt, and unpretty. But neither is the bushman correspondingly noble, and this is his important contribution to the interpretative literature of colonial Australia. Penton resists the tendency to idealise the pioneer as the simple, honest-to-god, down-to-earth species. (In reaction to this tendency he swings, perhaps, too far in the opposite direction.) The land, far from being the purifying agent of the romantic and neo-platonic tradition, is shown as, if anything, intensifying and magnifying the inherent defects in human nature. The notion of the classical idyll is rudely shattered on the inhospitable expanses of the Australian hinterland. Nobody we meet in the novel deserves much in the way of respect: all must compromise their standards (those that had them). Yet the picture is not irremediably, or even principally, a negative one. Penton is concerned to show a new people in formation, and some of the forces acting

upon them: ultimately the whole thing is worthwhile, as Cabell is made to see in one of his reflective moments:

> he perceived the progress of his own achievements not merely as his bank balance reflected it, but as part of the progress of a continent, and his imagination was stirred. His trials seemed to have a place in a pattern, to be not wholly without meaning.

Gradually, slowly, over the long years, Cabell develops a kind of negative sense of belonging. He would be a pathetic figure back in Europe now, for the land has made him her own, and has put her unmistakeable seal upon him. 'Ordeal and suffering', he realises, 'might tie a man to a place more closely than happiness. Happiness? Wasn't it perhaps, just the memory of ordeals and difficulties endured and over come?'

I have said that the literary idyll is

shattered in the pioneering experience, and so it is. And yet it is not entirely banished. Certainly the passive and indolent arcadia is firmly expelled: Australia is cruel and harsh. But this is not to say that man can never feel spiritually akin to it. Yet before he can do so he must wrestle with it (Penton uses the biblical image of Jacob wrestling with the angel all night, and of being left with the permanent mark of disfigurement in the encounter), experience its strength and cruelty, discover his own weaknesses and strengths, and if he endures, he may achieve a sense of belonging truly to that environment, and no longer to any other:

> A strange mood settled on Cabell. He felt at once calm and excited. It was something the moon was doing to everyone and everything in the valley. Remote in depthless peace, the gums rose tall, statuesque, motionless, with a white flame of blossoms burning at the top. But their shadows were still alive with whispers, the brush of wings, the suppressed cries of the flying foxes feasting on the orange-scented flowers. The silver strip of river flowed silently from shadow to

> shadow, but here and there a fish rose, rippled the surface, broke the quiet. From the scrub, covered with blackest darkness, roofed with a dome of silver, came the quivering cries of animals intoxicated with moonlight. So it was with Cabell. A dreamy contentment like quiet sleep possessed his body, relaxing weary nerves and muscles. But under this his blood thrilled with a passionate stirring - a passionate, deep yearning, towards what he could not have said, did not even ask. Consciousness, too, had found a moment of rest, and he was utterly submerged in the mood that entranced his hold on everything that had kept him alien in the land and had become a part of its wild fantasy - to him, for that moment, no longer strange, no longer fantastic. He felt content.

Sentiments more proper, one feels, to a much later generation, to Penton himself even, rather than to the crusty old Cabell. Evidently we are not so far from the mystical and neo-platonist universe after all.

II. The sequel to Landtakers - Inheritors (1936) - adds nothing that is thematically new. The novel, in fact, can scracely claim to be a novel of the land, since the centre of its action is no longer the land, no longer the labouring pioneers, but the city, and

colonial businessmen. No doubt Hadgraft is right in seeing in this second volume evidence of Penton's impatience with public reputations as he encountered them in his life as a newspaper editor, but unfair in dismissing it with short shrift on that account. H.M. Green cautions against such dismissal: 'With all Penton's and Herbert's over-emphasis however, and with Furphy's also for that matter, it is well that the truth underlying what they have to say should be brought to mind.' (64)

Cabell, after forty-six years of bullocking labour, sees the new generation about him:

> This damned generation, with its fancy clothes and soft hands and everything made clear and easy for it, was beginning to put on airs and look down its nose.

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(64) History of Australian Literature, VolII, p.1124, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1961.

'Civilisation' is beginning to replace the rough and ready days of the first land-takers. But the novel looks backward and draws important conclusion from the pioneering past, with which Landtakers, was concerned, and as such deserves consideration here.

Polite society of Inheritors is beginning to look back with guilt and distaste to its questionable origins: to the greedy and ruthless squatters (as Penton would have us see them) who opened up the interior, and to the race of transported felons who were their helpers. In respect to this theme Penton is the iconoclast in two senses, (i) in refusing to idealise the pioneers, and (ii) in exposing the subsequent hypocrisy of succeeding generations that insisted on the game of idealistic pretense in regard to the past:

With the past so painfully recent, with the

> gaunt pioneers, more than ever appalling in their old age, still haunting the scene, the skirmishes of social life in a little community were bitter. Money plus a clean history, with a titled second cousin somewhere in England, were unassailable. But some had money and convict ancestors, and others had money and no convict ancestors, but were drunkards, or had broods of half-caste children on the escutcheon, or were reputed cattle duffers, or had been indicted for selling sly grog on their runs, or had illiterate or low-born fathers or mothers at the roots of the family tree. All such drawbacks were eagerly canvassed and thrashed out and magnified over bars and tea-tables, as they would be for another generation until time and intermarriage had effaced the harsh outlines of the landtakers' ambiguous lives, or which only the effect would survive in stringent libel laws, a submerged sense of shame and inferiority, and an anxious abasement to all forms of gentility that would amount almost to a national disease.

Distasteful though the tough methods of the early pioneers were, degrading though the earlier experience had been, the truth about it is infinitely preferable to Penton than the subtle process of distortion of history that, he believes, followed it. As Harriet, Cabell's daughter, reflects:

> She was frightened of her father and she hated him, but he was really finer than James

> whatever he had done, because rather than kowtow to his father he had gone out into the bush and carved a place for himself, whereas James was too weak or afraid.

If the convict sub-stratum of society is a source of some anxiety to later generations (James, for example, pays to suppress records of his mother's convict past), the truth about the pioneer is equally unpalatable. Penton traces the 'slow but certain apotheosis' of Cabell - not the fellow he became through murdering blacks, whacking the bush, fighting men, and keeping afloat in a land where the law was everyone for himself, but the stuff of myth: 'Ah, yes, the pioneers, the glorious pioneers!' Australian literature was in this respect no different from that of other societies looking backwards to a colonial past, although the compulsions to do so were possibly subtilly stronger. Hence from the essentially ignoble landtaker comes 'the noble Australian conquistador':

> Politicians, journalists, investors, and the merely polite encouraged him (James) to talk of his father and the way empires were founded. He complied, hesitantly at first. He told them of younger sons of good families leaving England like the old conquistadors with noble

> and romantic aspirations, of heroic fights with blacks, the idea of a new British land shining before them like St. James on his white horse at the battle of Otumba.

Comparisons with the Spanish-American colonial venture suggest themselves in a number of different ways to Penton. Anglo-saxon emigrants in Australia are aware of that other European emigrant people across the Pacific, especially those whose economic background - livestock and grain - was so similar to their own. Deep social divisions had developed in Australia, due largely to the nature of the founding of the colony, and they were producing tensions liable to explode into violence between the squattocracy (the land owners) and the bushmen. 'People said that the boom was over, and that what had happened in the Argentine would happen here. There would be unemployment, misery and revolution.'

The Spanish-American republics had become something of a beacon and symbol to the Australian labouring classes

(the New Australia venture in Paraguay was a direct result of this). If the strike of the shearers fails, Budge insists

> we'll still have our lives and our ideals. We can go somewhere else and start again where there are no squatters. South America wants settlers. They'll give us land. It's a republic there already. They've thrown off the yoke. They'll take us like brothers....

Penton is right to probe the deep divisions that ran through the incipient Australian society, and to show the importance of Australian political utopianism linked to a dream of freedom in a virgin land that could so easily have converted Australia into the working man's paradise, according to the gospel of Lenin. That this failed to happen is, in Penton's view, largely due to the peculiar kind of man that the nature of outback life developed. On the one hand it was true that

> the sons of lags and the immigrants were a hard bitten stock raised in mining camps and shepherds' huts and the homestead of poverty-stricken selectors, and had no use for 'these Nancy English ways'. Their genius was for using their hands and enduring heat, thirst, and bullocking graft, a sardonic contempt for anybody unlike themselves, and a strange gift for mateship, which Coyle said was the legacy from the jailyard and men sticking together in the bush. They were dug into the country, and their struggle with the bosses was taking on the grand outlines of a nationalistic crusade.

But on the other hand, the mark of the land was irremovably upon them - they were a race of individualists at heart, and not amenable to organization and leadership. Coyle's ringing words, quoting Pope Gregory to the effect that the earth from which men had sprung belonged to all men in common, and that therefore the fruits of it belonged to all, can bewitch them momentarily, but Berry's doubtful 'Murder's murder' immediately broke

> the spell Coyle put on them. The compact, grey anonymity of their uptilted faces changed into a dozen contradictory expressions of doubt, scorn, disapproval, despair, fear, and amusement, re-establishing their normal character of bushmen sardonic and aloof from leadership in an independence forged by a land whose unpredictable moods a man must generally face alone.

Nevertheless, there is some reality to the religion of mateship, which will do much to condition the ambience of the new society. It is not Cabell and the squattocracy that will provide the soul of the new Australia - to the end of his day's Cabell's heart remains elsewhere, and so does that of his son James: they remain Europeans. James dreams of his

house that he will build, an exact replica of Owerbury Hall in England, with 'an English lawn down that side of the slope, another tennis court over there, a bowling green on the shady side, and all these unsightly native trees gone.' All this will, no doubt, feature to some extent in the new Australia; but deep down there is a consciousness of something else, an air of the soul that finds its origins in a rougher and tougher tradition: 'And this is Australia - the bush, and graft, and your mates, and a man proving what he is by what he can do, not by who his grandfather was or how much he's got in his roll.' It is the egalitarian dream again made realizable by the racial excision and by the prospects of a fresh start in a clean new world uncluttered with the preconceptions of the old, and who can blame Coyle if his hope was to prove naive in the light of the society that in fact developed?

Penton's contribution to the Australian novel is to have shown both the worst and the best of the hopes and

deeds of the builders of the new society: Cabell, an object lesson in greed and ruthlessness, and yet whose iron will imposed itself upon a recalcitrant continent; Coyle, the crafty and unpleasant shearer, who yet voices the finest aspirations of the brotherhood of mates:

> "This is a new, fresh soil where you can build up something because everybody isn't discouraged by seeing the castles and jails and battlefields which tell them how old evil is in the world. Look." He picked up a handful of the road dust. "When I cut myself I rub this dirt on the cut and it heals it, because it is clean dirt, not like the dirt in the Old World, full of disease and evil, which kills you when it gets in a wound. Here there is none of man's filth in the soil. The Garden of Eden and the reign on love on earth would grow here again if we wished it."

An exaggerated and impossible hope, maybe, but finely traced and chronicled by Penton, and certainly an important element in the thinking of Australia's pioneering past.

Chapter 8

Eleanor Dark:
A New People in a New Land

1. In her trilogy The Timeless Land (1940), Storm of Time (1948) and No Barrier (1953), of which I propose to examine the first and the last, (first because of my limitation of two books per author, and secondly, because the omission excludes nothing that is thematically important), Eleanor Dark seeks to interpret the early colonial era in terms of the historical novel, and in particular to interpret the European encounter with a virgin continent and its consequences. Of these three novels, The Timeless Land is by far the most satisfying, probably because the problems of the European intruder in Australia, and those of the indigenous inhabitants, are examined at their acutest, in the first few years of contact. The experience is still a novel one for both races, unblurred by past memories of repeated contacts.

The novelist (drawing all the time upon actual letters and documents of the time, a triumph of scholarly

arrangement) delicately counterpoises the psychology of the aborigene to that of the European: each lives in his own thought world and obeys the cultural dictates of that world. Eleanor Dark's achievement must be seen to reside in the skill with which she seeks to recreate those mental landscapes, and in the tension that she achieves in depicting the two contact races bound by the imperatives of their own 'law'. The two laws are irreconcilable, so that ultimate compromise is impossible, and the fate of the indigenous race takes on the dimensions of tragedy. There is, nevertheless, a kind of evolutionary determinism at work which will have its way, however much we may agonize with her (as we do) over the fate of the native population. Remorseless laws of life and survival are at work which will not be denied, so that whilst on the one hand our sympathies are fully engaged on behalf of the aborigine, we are equally as much swept along with the pioneering vision of Governor Phillip and impressed by the dogged resolve of the white man to conquer and hold the land. Lament and paeon are exquisitely counterpoised, and the virtues and defects of both races subtilly probed.

The very earliest colonial condition is ignoble in several respects. Here is no picture of the intrepid settler turning his back upon European society to conquer the wilderness and carve out a new life for himself, but a boatload of felons, malodorous and brutalized, and so bereft of dignity as to appear to the watching aborigenes quite another 'tribe' from the spruce red-coated guards who attend them. They are, further-more, quite unsuited to the demands of the new life: they lack most of the skills that an act of successful colonization requires. The moral deficiencies of the intruders become painfully evident to the natives as soon as the first tentative contacts are established: there is an essential disharmony, a lack of internal cohesion about the newcomers that is distressing in the extreme to the natives. The white man's physical appearance may be strange, his clothing (an item that in itself provokes astonishment in a people who as yet see little need of it) bizarre, but it is his mind that is truly alien. How can the aborigene hope to understand a mind 'already astray in the labyrinths of its own psychological chaos'? The theme is evidently a significant

one for Eleanor Dark, since she returns to it repeatedly throughout the novel. The European lives in a mental world that is devoid of inner integrity, in which God and Mammon co-exist, in which he can proclaim one law, and live in conformity to another - unlovely characteristics that compare unfavourably with the integrated psychic life of the aboriginal:

> It was a mind which had gained in subtlety and lost simplicity, a mind which explored the universe, but had long, long ago lost sight of itself. It was a mind which, finding its activities incompatible with its faith, had gradually substituted for that faith a system of mechanical worship by which it was enabled to believe that it might simultaneously serve God and Mammon. It was a mind which had become active, so ingenious, so tough, so flexible, so tortuous, that it was able to make a show of holding apart the indivisible forces of man's soul. It was able to say devoutly in one section: "Thou shalt not kill," while from another it invented plausible justifications for massacre. It was able to proclaim: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and bend all its energies to the building of power and dominion. It was able to extol mercy and be merciless, to preach kindness and be brutal, to praise truth and practise deceit.

As Booron, the native-woman who had had the distinction of living amongst the colonists and the opportunity to study them at first hand, observes: a law, if it was

anything, was surely something to live by. 'Among her own people it was exactly that. It made hard, but not impossible, demands upon their courage and their self-control. It was so intricately interwoven not only with their own physical and spiritual needs, but with the peculiarities of the land itself, that all three became one, a mystical trinity functioningin harmony - the Law, the Land, the People.' The white man thus becomes a vulgar, greedy intruder, a horror of moral ambiguity, a predatory land-grabber whose very presence is something of an insult to the quiet of the ancient land and its people. Phillip himself reflects that the Sydney Cove settlement looks like a 'fresh wound' on the land:

> It was not possible, he thought, pushing his blanket back restlessly, to visit the other coves, or to explore the other great harbours which lay to the north and the south, without feeling the poignancy of their wild and uncontaminated loveliness. It was not possible to return here, to walk the muddy, trampled ground, to see the rows of miserable huts, the sorry patches of garden, begun and abandoned, the heaps of stacked bricks and firewood, the sullen, hopeless, planless ugliness of the place, without an uneasy sense of desecration.

The desecration is confirmed by the perpetual 'torment of sound' that fills the camp of the white man - shoutings, bangings, the tramp of feet, clankings of chains, loud reports from fire-breathing weapons, cries of pain, incessant hammerings and loud music, all in significantly marked contrast to the great silence of the land and its aboriginal people. The brash invaders are essentially looters who have yet to learn the lessons that have been absorbed by the native population from immemorial time, and whose looting presence (as the remarkably precognitive Phillip is made to reflect) will constitute an ecological threat to the continent:

> They will fight it, he thought uneagily; they will fight it in their impatience because it is not an easy land, a fruitful, kindly, responsive land like the one they have known. His eyes, staring abstractedly at the clear water in the glass, made a crystal of it in which he seemed to watch, like some ancient seer, the smoke and dust of a battle waged by generations against a land which would accept them only when, with difficulty and humility, they had learned that she was not theirs, but they were hers, He saw them, driven by the reckless greed, and by an obscure urge for conquest so aloof and invulnerable a foe, exhausting her earth, fouling her rivers, despoiling her trees, savagely imposing upon the pattern of her native loveliness

> traditional forms which meant beauty in other lands. He heard them crying out to her insatiably: "Give! Give!" and was aware of her silent inviolability which would never give until they had ceased to rob.

Eleanor Dark contrasts this with the spiritual integrity of the indigenous population - and this is no mere variation of the noble savage theme. The native lives his life in an integrated universe in which myths, morals, life-habits, religion and death cohere, and the centre and source of this coherence is the native's attachment to the land from which he has sprung. The life he leads is naive and simple, and <u>therefore</u> free from the torments of European man. Even the apparent brutalities of his life, seen in the wider context of the natural rhythms of his life (and, one feels too, in the light of modern anthropological research) have an inner consistency. Taunted beyond endurance by the female wiles of Barangaroo, Bennilong, the warrior and song-maker, pursues her:

> He caught her just as she reached the rocky slope of the hill, and she turned on him like a fury, biting, scratching, kicking. This was all in order, and easily

> dealt with. Already Bennilong's resentment was being transmuted into desire, his wounded male pride assuaged by the consciousness of his strength and dominance. He gave her a blow on the side of the head which reduced her to half-swooning acquiescence, and then, grabbing her by the wrist, made off into the kindly shelter of the bush.

The wooing is rough, and she suffers pain, but that is the lot of woman. She acquiesces in his mastery, and he exults in it. Undeniably, there are echoes here of the European fascination with primitive man, and his enviable sexual freedom, and Eleanor Dark undoubtedly finds much to admire in the social patterns of the aboriginal prior to the degeneration that set in after the European conquest, but she convinces us that a sort of primitive, morally consistent, utopia did once exist, some substance lies behind the idea. It is a view of aboriginal society that Alan Moorehead finds reconcilable with the facts of history: 'These, then' he says, 'were the tough, vigorous, gentle, superstitious and conservative people whom Banks found but one degree removed from the brutes, and whom Dampier described as the miserablest on earth. Yet they were neither brutal nor miserable before

the white men came. In a harsh and barren country they had established a perfectly valid way of life, they had kept the race alive through unknown centuries of time, they threatened no one, and coveted nothing except the barest minimum of food. They had the art of living for the day, they knew how to laugh and enjoy themselves, and if they had no ambition at least they possessed the Greek quality of φιλωτιμω - the knowing of one's place in the world(63). No doubt the primitive rape described above would be reprehensible in a society that understood the relationship between sex and conception, but in this society one action is linked to another in a meaningful and integrated continuum: love, hunting, eating dancing, suffering, dying. The sequel to Bennilong's seizure of his woman follows naturally, and establishes his essential innocence:

> When the dusk came quietly between the trees, he stood up and began to think of the fish he had speared and loaded into his canoe. He was very, very hungry. By now they would be prepared; they would be taken from the hot stones of the ovens and carefully released from their wrappings of wet grass and leaves, and the smell

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(63) The Fatal Impact pp 169-70 op. cit.

> of them would be good in the nostrils of hungry men. Life was perfect and complete. He lifted his arms above his head and stretched his body taut in enjoyment of so excellent a world, in which a man had only to eat and sleep to renew the strength which he had expended on hunting and love.

The rustic idyll, however, is not to endure. The natural nobility of the savage, deriving from his simple life, is doomed to disappear. The moral collapse of Bennilong - his decline from fine hunter, leader and song maker of his tribe, to the degenerate drunk at the white man's door - is symbolic of the spiritual and physical humiliation of his people. The collapse is rapid and final. Once the fine balance of the wild man's life is upset, nothing can preserve his society intact. Morally inferior though the flogger's society might be, it must prevail over the antipodean arcadia.

Eleanor Dark catches something of the aborigene's horror at the degradation of manhood that civilised European society achieves in an incident of flogging; death must come to all, it is true, but in

meeting it a man is here supported by the tribe incorporate, whether it be in battle, or peacefully at home - there is no disgrace in death, and no indignity; but European man succeeds in making death (and life) an undignified and shameful thing. The native cries out in uncomprehending amazement at the systematic brutality that the convicts suffer at the hands of their fellow men; he weeps in unbelief at the terrible spectacle of public hangings. Even a native woman can recognize the inhumanity and degradation of the lash:

> Once Colbee's wife, the gentle Daringha, was the innocent cause of trouble. One of the despised white ones (convicts) stole her fishing line, and was caught in the act .. All the natives about the camp at the time were summoned to witness his punishment, and as they stood uneasily watching the lash coil over the naked bloodstained back, their repugnance found expression in loud cries of horror and condemnation. Daringha wept bitterly, crouching on the ground with her head between her knees so that she need not see, but Baraggaroo was furious. The primary instincts of her sex taught her that debased manhood was a peril to any tribe; it was an insult to that posterity which it was woman's business to produce. She snatched a heavy stick from the ground, and rushed at the man who wielded the lash, but she could not reach him. The red-coated ones closed round him to hold her back, and the horrible punishment went on. She shouted fiercely to him to stop, and her cry was echoed by her own countrymen as they stood, a swaying black group, agitated, aghast, torn by anger and pity, and by the fear of something which threatened to undermine their whole philosophy of life.

If the native's way of life depends upon the uninterrupted possession of his hunting lands, then an external assault upon the land is ipso facto an assault upon himself. The native and his land are inseparable. His life has no meaning apart from it:

> the Earth was their land, and only their land, and they, borne upon the rhythm of succeeding generations, were its breath, part of it, so closely knit with it that they changed only as it changed, laying the quiet centuries behind them as the outer world laid its feverish years.

The arrival of the white man is seen all the time in the novel as an assault, an intrusion, a usurpation, which the land itself sullenly resents and resists. It provides no food: no berries, little game or fish, its soil is inhospitable, often the colony is on the verge of starvation (much to the astonishment of the native bushman, whose knowledge of the land enables him to live off it without difficulty). 'Here the spade jarred in one's hand against the unyielding earth, the sun burned and the storms flayed,

and the vast trees shed tough bark upon the ground instead of soft, swiftly rotting leaves.' In Stephen Mannion's view 'It is a barbarous, God-forsaken country, only fit for the savages who inhabit it.'

Such, so far, are the essential themes of the novel: the native, a product of his land and deeply in tune with its ancient rhythms, an integrated being, morally superior to and yet doomed by the technologically superior race of invading Europeans.

There is too a third person of the drama, and that is the land itself, that dominates both native and European and which dictates the terms upon which life will be lived upon it. The native is seen as so united with it as to be almost indistinguishable from it, for he is as much an expression of it as the flora. Andrew Prentice alone, the escaped convict, begins to achieve anything like the kind of relationship with the land that the natives take for granted, and to him, conscious as he is of the new forces moulding him, the experience is weird and night-marish.

He has had to struggle and battle for survival in the bush, refuse to give in to despair and to resist 'the unseen forces of the land which were waiting to destroy him'; his moral fibre is rewarded with success: 'It was as if, having tried him, and found him not less stubborn than itself, the land had grown less hostile.' Governor Phillip is Prentice's aspirational counterpart; he too displays the kind of qualities that will eventually make colonization and identification possible, but for him the land remains a mystery, its true conquest must be left to others. It is Prentice in the wilderness to whom the land speaks. His union with the aboriginal girl is again a symbol of mystical union with the land, and the birth of his child its voice:

> - a cry of pain and triumph. It was as if this land, whose silence had always baffled him, had become articulate at last. His sleep-befogged brain had recoiled from it in terror, knowing all the time that no recoil could save him. He was identified with it - helplessly, irrevocably. The land had taken him, used him, fashioned new life from him; his blood and his breath were now, even when he died, a part of it for ever.

Prentice has proved his title, and achieves dignity and worth in the process. The degraded felon undergoes a trial by endurance and emerges as a true son of the land he treads. European man sees the number of his possessions as the measure of his worth, but for the aboriginal in this hard land things are different, 'the only true test of tribal virility - survival.' Here a man's encounter with the land is the measure of his worth. Patrick Mannion is right in seeing the house as a challenge to the trees, for the land invites battle, and will give itself only to the strong:

> Sometimes, as he had gathered even during his short sojourn among them (the natives), there was pain and privation to be borne, but he knew, though his knowledge became confusion when he tried to speak of it, that there these things were not a succession of brutal humiliations, but opportunities for endurance, tests of strength.

For Mannion the colonial experience is a road to self-illumination. Bereft of his gentlemanly background and the hereditary props to his life, he sees himself plainly as 'useless and inefficient'; 'he had no background here, and without it he was nothing.' He suffers a temporary moral

collapse, a total loss of confidence. He will have to begin again, as will all those who abandon the cosy European world where man is never called upon to prove his worth by a hand-to-hand encounter with a new and alien environment, 'the clear-drawn pattern of the social structure they had known blurring, fading, growing unreal and unimportant and some new conception arising, born out of their union with the land.'

For Prentice, too, there is illumination and fulfilment. There is the deep satisfaction of achievement and success as he surveys his labours in the wilderness; for Prentice the convict, the man corrupted by the city, is a man who has been alienated from the land from his boyhood: he thus becomes the archetype of the new Australian man who finds regeneration and salvation, who rediscovers himself and achieves a new dignity in the ownership and success that the land bestows. 'It had also yielded something less material which he had recognized with a queer emotion of mingled astonishment and joy. He had rediscovered in it a fulfilment,

a contentment long forgotten - he had rediscovered the earth.'

Even the Reverend Mr. Johnson has the same mystical sense of fulfilment:

> He spread his left hand out and looked at it, this inclination to see a grievance in its hard and roughened palm warring with the still small voice of honesty which reminded him that he had derived a strangely deep spiritual satisfaction, as well as much material benefit, from his cultivation of the soil. His conscience told him that he was, in his heart, more interested in the welfare of his cucumbers, his melons, his seedling limes and oranges, his beans and peas and guavas, than in the welfare of the immortal souls committed to his care.

II. After sketching and interpreting the growth of the New South Wales colony, in No Barrier Eleanor Dark takes us to the end of the first colonial impulse, to the successful crossing of the Blue Mountains that had hitherto restricted the colony to the coastal plain. The growth of this civilised outpost in a wild and distant continent is now an established fact: there is no longer any question of the colony being forced to withdraw through an incapacity to

survive in an unfamiliar and hostile milieu. Agriculture flourishes right up to the foot of the mountains. Starvation is now unlikely. Man's mark upon the land is unmistakeable, and Sydney has all the florescences that belong to the self-consciously polite society. Indeed one is exceedingly aware of the polite society sources of Eleanor Dark's documentation; it dominates her story; apart from the doings of Johnny Prentice, son of the escaped convict, Andrew, and the runaway Matthew Finn who survive in the bush, she presents a broadly upper class view of the new society, a view from the top: the lower orders are kept at a tasteful distance, although there is no lack of sympathy for the convict condition. Governor Macquarie can proudly lay the foundation stone of his new hospital and see in it the clear sign of civilization's imposition upon the wilderness, for 'What was man without buildings? What was the human community without cities?' The colonists are also aware of their now fortunate state: profit and not survival is the uppermost thought, for the land was beginning to bend to their will; the problem is now something quite other:

> The colonists were becoming more and more forcibly aware that they inhabited a rich land; they were observing not only meat and grain far in excess of what the colony could consume, and wool now known to be commercially valuable, but the presence ofother commodities such as timber, coal and whale-oil, which held alluring promises of profit. Where was the market, once the needs of the colony itself had been satisfied?

The East India Company and the independent merchants of the mother country had better watch out.

Furthermore, the colonists are dimly beginning to perceive that they are a new breed of men, that their experience has become so much a part of their lives that they no longer fit neatly into the category labelled 'European': already they are conscious of themselves as 'colonials', as different. Return to Europe becomes increasingly difficult as the years pass and as one's stake in the land - both physical and emotional - becomes greater. Connor Mannion expresses the dilemma:

> The longing for a glimpse of her native land was never quite absent from her heart, yet though there was a faint wonder in her mind that this wealthy and foot-loose young man should of his own choice remain here, she was determined to do the same. Yearn as she might

> for England, her roots had gone deep into the soil of New South Wales, and at least one of the problems which beset her husband was already resolved for her. It was not merely the estates to which she would cling; nor the merino flock, valuable as it was; nor even the house, surrounded by the garden she had made, and filled with familiar objects whose gradual acquisition formed a kind of history of her colonial life. She had a woman's respect for concrete achievement, a woman's instinct to hold fast to what the years had built. One did not create only to abandon.

Relative new-comers like young Laetitia have as yet developed little feeling for the land, and can only sigh nostalgically for the home country. Sydney can offer little - a crude imitation merely of London society, a rather bedraggled looking town, some pretty drives, certainly but little else congenial to a nice young lady. The men are busy carving up the new world, but the ladies find it a bore. Of music, poetry, painting, the theatre and the soirees there is little enough, only indeed such as the amateur talent of the antipodean drawing room permits - and always one was liable 'to come upon those miserable, dirty, naked savages.'

For the men, the perspective is different. They are engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter with the earth. ED sees

this less as a love affair than as a rape, as a determined resolve to possess at all costs, regardless of right, and in the shortest possible time. Patrick, born in the land, and now inheriting what his father has seized, is aware of the process. Land has been cleared, possession is a physical fact, but is it yet a mental one? 'They had barely begun to know this land; had they ever tried to learn it, or had they merely attacked it savagely with axe and plough? A rape, he thought - all taking, and no love.' The physical frontiers, certainly, are pushed gradually back, but the deeper business of adaptation, assimilation, of identity, 'was a business for the frontiers of the mind'.

This is one of the most interesting features of ED's novels - the attempt to analyse the process of the mental transformation of the settlers as she recreates the historical setting. The action never remains at the superficial level of historical recitation but always flows from deep psychic currents which the novelist seems to intuit

extraordinarily well, so much so in fact that Green pays her the tribute of suggesting that in her fiction may 'come nearer to truth than history'. Her settlers exist in a state of chronic tension, constantly surprised at the myriad subtle ways in which they find themselves adjusting their view of themselves and their world, poised between the old world and the new, the latter exercising an ever stronger gravitational hold upon them:

> but while he (Miles Mannion) searched the past his eyes were finding an answer in the present, looking with a kind of hunger at the river and the hills which imperceptibly, day by day, claimed him. I must break away from them, he thought, I must go home, home, home (his mind repeated the word, testing it), and find myself a wife, and do my duty to posterity ...

The trouble is that the new world imposes itself as much upon the settler as the settler imposes himself upon it. There is no real appreciation of the magnitude of the change they have made, and indeed a sense of irritation at the very idea that any fundamental adjustment will be necessary:

> 'A different land - yes, of course (Patrick Mannion agrees). But why, merely because the place is different, should the whole form and spirit of society change? Can we not', he demanded with some annoyance, 'shape a society as we please? There are certain factors - things within the realm of nature - to which we must adapt our customs, it is true... but...there's more than that...'

Much has to be learned afresh. For one thing, the eye had to learn to see again, and that would require time and aesthetic adjustment. The Mannions' stately home at Beltrasna, for example, boasts a fine portrait in oils of that member of the Irish gentry who was its founder:

> Above the mantlepiece in the dining room hung his portrait in oils, executed during his last visit to Ireland; his handsome face looked out of it commandingly over the immaculate ruffles of his shirt, his hand with its signet ring clasped the lapel of an elegant coat; the artist, seeking an appropriate setting for a gentleman pioneering in the wilderness, had permitted his fancy to improve upon tales of New Holland, and placed his subject against a background of sunlit fields, dotted with negro labourers and backed by towering peaks of malevolent aspect. To Julia this was Papa, and it did not occur to her to contrast the peaks with the low, quiet, dull green foothills across the river;

As Laetitia confesses to Connor Mannion, in this land 'even our eyes and ears seem to hear and see differently

...I cannot see beauty as he (Miles) sees it. Sounds which to me are painful, give him pleasure. Those dreadful insects in the trees - can you believe it, he woke one morning when they first began their piercing din, and cried out: "Ah, there's music!"[4] Conditioned by his longer association with the land Miles no longer has any use for a 'pretty' landscape of hills, dales, brooks, lambs and bluebells. The land has created an altogether more astringent taste;

> For Nature, here, had not employed her customary techniques for the fashioning of beauty and grandeur. She had flung up no towering mountains, nor had she splashed the landscape with vivid and dramatic colour. She had worked not only quietly, but (so one seemed to feel) with incredible deliberation, subduing line and tint to produce those low hills, clothed in a monotone of dull green, as if to prove that between the blues of the sea and heaven common to all lands, she could create a new beauty, and an unfamiliar grandeur.

The note of tragedy, first introduced in The Timeless Land, continued in The Storm of Time, with respect to the impact of colonization upon the native tribes, continues to sound in No Barrier; and if it is less frequently heard, that is not because the tragedy is any the less, but because it has become hopeless, and less remarkable.

The collapse of aboriginal tribal life, incipient in the first volume of the trilogy, has become irredeemably fact in the third. Phillip's romantic paternalism is now to be seen for the shallow thing it was. One race can extend only at the cost of the other; remorselessly determinist laws are at work that will squeeze the aboriginal from his holding however he may resist. The one-time condescending friendliness of the labourers and shepherds towards him has now turned to unyielding hostility: thieves are they whose lands, held since the dream time, are year by year stolen by the settlers. The paradox is heartrending, and there is no mistaking ED's sympathy for the dispossessed.

The greatest loss, however, is not the loss of the land - though that is great enough - but the loss of spiritual orientation that goes with it, the psychic shock that primitive people undergo upon discovering that the whole fabric of their life concept is meaningless before the terrible exorcist power of European man.

For the European not only invades their lands but their souls as well, leaving them doubly dispossessed, and giving them nothing in return:

> The mystery was gone, the miracle broken. Perhaps it had gone long ago, and he had clung to its shadow, knowing that the loss of one mystery is the first step towards the loss of all. Not only he, but every member of his tribe, had known this dread as the white men, foes of mystery, closed in upon them, invading not only the land that gave them bodily sustenance, but the unseen, spirit world of their beliefs. It was this, far more than the sticks-of-fire, which was dangerous to his people, inflicting doubts like wounds, so that their very will to survive was injured, and a strange, cold apathy possessed them.

Towards the end of the book, Johnny receives in his remote camp the aboriginal refugees of a broken tribe, dispossessed by the ever-expanding settler tide. The white man has broken all the taboos, and yet still survives. Thus 'Billabong and his family , it appeared, were in flight from the unendurable spectacle of mystery dissolving.' There is never any solution proposed: Eleanor Dark knows none, and in any case events are past beyond recall.

All is tragic inevitability, the shameful side of the colonial coin: no barrier can or will be tolerated by the tide of history.

Meanwhile, 'the houses advance and the trees retreat', and the Sydney colony braces itself for its great thrust across the mountains, the last symbol of resistance. Whilst Europe is embroiled in its territorial wars with Napoleon, a road begins to reach out from Sydney and creep towards the Emu Plains towards the foothills. The way through is known, and a good land lies ahead. But the action of the novel does not come to an end, rather it is left suspended, incomplete, with materials being prepared to bridge the river, and the road advancing inexorably, foot by foot - the visible signs of a land conquest being carried resolutely to an end.

Chapter 9

Patrick White:
Man and his World - A Riddle

In the hands of Australian novelist Patrick White the novel of the land becomes something quite other than anything that has preceded it. It remains unique in Australian fiction, and finds no counterpart in the land novel of Spanish America in its narrative technique.

Two of this writer's novels command our attention here inasmuch as the matrix of both is a species of land encounter: The Tree of Man (1956) and Voss (1957). In the former we follow the fortunes of a pioneering family; in the latter, the steps, mental and physical (in that order) of the explorer Voss, who aims to cross the Australian continent for the first time.

White is a metaphysician, for whom the central problem is ontological. The simple fact of <u>being</u> emerges in these two novels as an unfathomable mystery with which man is doomed to wrestle all his life, half glimpsing, half catching at realities that remain, elusive and insubstantial, beyond his power to seize and possess. His centre of interest is psychological, that is, concerned with subtle states of mind and awareness created by the continuous impact of experience from without, an interest that is expressed in terms of the stream of consciousness novel.

I. <u>The Tree of Man</u> is the spiritual history of Stan Parker, of his encounter with life and the land, and of his faltering attempts to comprehend his own small place in it.

As a young man in the parental home 'mystery was not his personal concern, doubts were still faint

echoes. Certainly he had seen the sea, and the hurly burly of it did hollow out of him a cave of wonderment and discontent.' He had read Hamlet in his mother's Shakespeare, but 'there seemed no question of interpretation. Anyway, not yet.' The state of innocence, however, will not long survive.

It has been remarked that The Tree of Man is an Australian Genesis: and so it is, but it is not the Genesis of the Garden of Eden; it is the Genesis of the post-Fall condition, the Genesis of man expelled from the Garden and compelled to make a new life in an inhospitable world, a world that will demand sweat in return for bread. The man leaves the Garden with the burden of his ignorance still heavy upon him. His yearning 'to know', to have his eyes opened to the full meaning of his being (that first tempts him into speculative sin), still unsatisfied, and indeed, confirmed upon him as a curse of an outraged god.

When Stan Parker's independent adult life begins, that is, when he goes outback to take up some uncleared land of his father's, he is archetypal man entering upon a fallen and savage world, and in token of this White confers upon him the biblical and generic title of 'the man'. 'The man' begins to tear the bush apart, to fell trees; he encounters 'the warfare of the scrub, deadly in technique and omnipresence, that would come up from behind and leave warning on the flesh in messages of blood.' Stript to the waist, in a fury of impatience, possessed by a daemon of purpose, he hews and burns, harnesses his horse to drag logs, and slowly hacks out a place in the wilderness, and raises his frail house - frail in the relative sense that 'in those parts the earth predominated over the human being.' Here is the primitive Adam cast forth into the unkind world to create for himself a life from effort and sweat.

Soon he brings 'the woman' - Amy - to share his world, and they are able to put 'the mystery' to flight with their common awareness of immediate purpose. But Stan exists in a private thought world of his own, as does Amy (as we all do), and the gulf of silence between them can never be wholly bridged, though the desire to bridge it is strong: the visible, tangible world feeds its multifarious impressions into the mind, provoking innumerable half-formed questions that never can be fully articulated, much less answered. The very land at which Stan labours is heavy with impenetrable mystery, and mind finds it impossible to come to grips with such aggressive, all-enveloping matter that cannot, or <u>will</u> not, disclose itself:

> Stan Parker, who had never yet attempted to possess truth in its final form, was a lesser victim of the same deception. His Gold Coast still glittered in a haze of promise as he grubbed weeds out of his land, as he felled trees and tautened the wire fences he had put round what was his. It was, by this time, almost enclosed. But what else was his he could not say. Would his life of longing be lived

> behind wire fences? His eyes were assuming a distance from looking into distances. So he did begin then with impatience, even passion, to hew the logs that still lay, and to throw aside his axe at the end, with disgust, apparently for something wood will not disclose. He would listen to the sounds around him too, the thick and endless murmurs, from which a theme will threaten to burst, the one theme, and continue to threaten.

In this novel the land functions as an inscrutable expression of the will of God. It is not a subject in itself (to be loved or hated), but simply the scene in which the psychological dilemma of Stan and his wife Amy must be acted out: the dilemma of human awareness that is, nevertheless, finite, which knows, and which yet knows that there are limits to its knowing. As in Voss, the land is used as a vital numinous backdrop to the action: the novelist's real intention is not to write a pioneering novel (although he does this), but to probe his characters' psyches in the Joycean manner as they react to sense data.

For White, man is a small part of an

essentially unknowable reality. Stan moves through a wonderworld that is at times horrific and destructive, at other times benign and beneficent; but it seems always on the point of revealing its inner meaning, and yet never does. The lightning functions throughout the novel as the symbol of the potential power of illumination in the natural world, terrible, awful, and yet somehow possessing the clue to meaning, if only it could be read aright, 'But the hours of lightning are usually far between':

> Acts of terror [in Nature, such as the lightning] had exhilarated Stan Parker, too, before he had built his house. After that they had confused him, made him feel he had been taken in. Then when he had accepted his confusion, and lived longer, much later, not till now perhaps, in the shed with the confused and rebellious boy who was his son, those acts of terror did begin to illuminate the opposite goodness and serenity of the many faces of God.

The strange dualism of the world is as remarkable to White as it has been to other writers:

why does it terrify and repel and yet also inspire with a sense of love and communion, as it does with Stan, and has done with mystics since man became a self-conscious being?

> There was a lizard amongst the stones that the man saw, and to which his attention now clung with the hope of the hopeless. As if he might suddenly interpret for his son, by some divine dispensation, with such miraculous clarity and wisdom, the love and wonder the horny lizard had roused in him.

But 'That part of the bush was very grey. Its symbols would not be read.' Yet the world and all its experiences inspires a sense of mystical expectation: it is a world in which <u>all</u> phenomena - whether it be the lightning flash, the sound of his wife chafing her skin before the fire, the death of a cow in labour, or Amy's slippers under a chair - are of equal importance, and as strange:

> In spite of moments of true knowledge that

> came to him, animating his mind and limbs with conviction, telling him of the presence of God, lighting his wife's face when he had forgotten its features, bringing closer and closer a trembling leaf till its veins and vastness were related to all things, from burning sun to his own burned hand - in spite of this, Stan Parker had remained slow with men. It was a kind of unrealized ambition to communicate with them. But so far he had not done this.

But the life-code remains unbreakable:

> he was a prisoner in his human mind, as in the mystery of the natural world. Only sometimes the touch of hands, the lifting of silence, the sudden shape of a tree or presence of a first star, hinted at eventual release.

Meanwhile, the world has to be endured, and its customary face is hostile, whilst its forces reduce man to insignificance, 'a thing of gristle' (an echo of Yeats' 'a paltry thing'). The house that he has built of logs - 'matchsticks' relative to the inimical earth forces - creates an illusion of safety,but it is only an illusion, for it can take on the sinister character of a trap, as Amy fears when 'the wind began

to bash the small wooden box in which she had been caught'.

> God blew from the clouds, and men would scatter like leaves. It was no longer possible to tell who was on which side. Or is it ever possible to tell? Surrounded by the resentful inanimacy of rock and passionate striving of the trees, he was not sure. In this state he was possessed by an unhappiness, rather physical, that was not yet fear, but he would have liked to look up and see some expression of sympathy on the sky's face.

Bushfires, too, are a dreadful part of that chaos of telluric forces that threatens man's precarious existence:

> Each one realized the insignificance of his stature as he prepared to grasp the fire in a final wrestling. Then a fox ran screaming from the scrub, his fire fiercer. It was coming indeed. Several bursts of yellow smoke were released all of a sudden, as if from a bag. There was a smoking, smarting, and crackling, and breaking, and crashing. The fire was reaching upward from the undergrowth, and high upward, to embrace whole trees. There was a sighing of sap. A bird fell, flaming from the beak upward, into an agony of writhing twigs. Snatches of sky showed mercilessly remote and blue in the welter of smoke and fire.

Man's weakness and helplessness is in fact a major theme of the novel. What indeed is man but a tree bowed in the gales of life? There is nothing over which he seems to have any real control. Even the child in Amy's womb is being made independently of her will, 'even the sex of the unborn child had been decided by someone else. She was powerless.' Pregnancy is thus a highly suggestive symbol of human limitation, so that 'the child inside her protested, perhaps sensing some future frustration, already in the prison of her bones.' Man thus steps forth as a truly tragic figure, the plaything of a chaos of inscrutable forces, a pathetic paradox of a thing - 'the strong body of the weak man.'

The note of elegy is sustained throughout the novel. Life flows on in an unbroken continuum of action and interaction; there is never a break in the life-flow, nor is there any break in the flow of

human thought, in the stream of awareness which yet never succeeds in achieving a satisfactory articulation, is indeed almost unaware of its own existence, but which keeps the subconscious in a continual state of angst. Both Stan and Amy think in a thin scribble of undisciplined awareness that remains essentially private and incommunicable. For the reader, however, who has the privil‹ge of access to the inner minds of both characters, White sustains a delicate fugue of point and counterpoint in their musings that has the power to evoke that sense of 'half veiled shores', inexpressibly sad, that one normally associates more with the medium of music.

A message emerges unmistakeably. Man living in the post-Edenic world must not expect too much of life, for he is shut off from any real source of understanding. It is, indeed, noteworthy how often the biblical infra-structure of the novel breaks the surface.

The exile from Eden is one strongly suggestive myth that informs the action of The Tree of Man. The Great Flood is another. Man's derisive attempts to control his environment and secure himself is mocked by the fearful action of God in Nature. 'When the rain began in earnest... the lives of men and animals appeared both transitory and insignificant events beneath its terrible continuity, although in the early stages of deluge the rain was still rain.' It was not long to remain so:

> The great yellow mass, pricked and dimpled by grey rain, was there before them where the plain had been. The world was water now. It went in at the windows of houses and swirled at the roots of a steeple. The heads of dead trees were weather-cocked by perching birds.

The point is that the man and the land on which he dwells are part of a common phenomenon of being that will not be rationalised. The flood is a potent symbol of man's ultimate helplessness, an un-

mistakeable demonstration that nothing is constant and sure. Not even the land can function, as it commonly does in literature, as a symbol of permanence and integrity:

> It began to appear strange that they had been set afloat on the flood waters. It began to appear strange to everyone except Stan Parker, who by this time knew in himself that you can expect anything, and that it was not necessarily the hand of the mayor of Wullunya pointing the way to the flat boat. And ... he rowed, accepting the strangeness and inevitability of their position ... in the dissolved world of flowing water, under the drifting trees, it was obvious that solidity is not.

Yet it is really man's mental world, his inner vision of the outer scene, that is so fluid and insecure. Hence there is no contradiction when the novelist has recourse also to the notion of the land's permanence. Stan perceives that his own being is threatened by death in the great European war that has broken out, and at which his presence seems called for, so that the land he has tilled seems

suddenly to assume a terrifying, if relative, permanence, for 'now his own impermanence was in conflict with the permanence of all that scene, of bees and grass, murmuring and bending, murmuring and bending.'

In such a world, Stan's journey through life unfolds as an essentially existential affair, isolated and lonely, and lacking in any really meaningful contact with his fellows. To labour affords an avenue of escape from the curse of thought by providing strictly limited and attainable goals. There is no comforting philosophical or religious frame of reference. Life is a quest for knowledge that may never be vouchsafed, although man may think at times that he has glimpsed it. Death ends the experience, the cycle is complete. But the land - the naked land, not the deceptive city in which a man may hide from reality - remains, the scene of the struggle, the congealed stuff of the cosmos that resists interpretation. The man of the country is, perhaps, no closer to an understanding of the world's

meaning than his city counterpart, but he at least exists in a setting that more directly provokes the questions:

> In the end there are the trees. These still stand in the gully behind the house, on a piece of poor land that nobody wants to use. There is the ugly mass of scrub, full of whips and open secrets. But there are the trees, quite a number of them that have survived the axe, smooth ones, a sculpture of trees. On still mornings, the white and the ashen, and some the colour of flesh. There is nothing else in the bush, except the little sarsaparilla vine, of which the purple theme emerges from the darker undertones. There is silence, and a stone lizard. And a dog that has died recently, that the maggots have not yet had time to invade. The dusty dog lying with his muzzle turned sideways on his paws in perfect simplicity of death.

II. In Voss Patrick White presents us with the situation of a people for whom the first colonial impulse is over. The new arrivals cling to the litorral regions, and energetic coastal towns have sprung into being, eagerly attempting to reproduce the life and manners of Europe. But the real struggle has yet to be joined. All so far achieved is the mere overture to the life they are to enter upon, for the great interior remains a rather frightening mystery.

The world of the Sydney settlement is counter-poised by the vast, unknown continental interior that inspires insecurity and fear. 'Everyone', says Laura Trevelyan, 'is still afraid, or most of us, of this country, and will not say it. We are not yet possessed of understanding.' Clearly, the identical themes of The Tree of Man are to receive further exploration here, and one has to bear in mind constantly the two levels at which the novel subsists, the physical and the mental. The story is anchored in the historical and social reality of the New South Wales settlement, and yet it exists also at the level of allegory, indeed may be said to exist more truly at this level. The double entendre of the following passage is not immediately obvious:

> Unseeing people walked across the sandy earth, eating bread, or sat at meat in their houses of frail stone foundations, while the lean man, beneath his twisted tree, became familiar with each blade of withered grass at which he stared, even the joints of the body of the ant.

It is the man in touch with simple, more fundamental things than the deadening urban life, who can glimpse the implications of his surroundings. Mr. Bonner, comfortable, prosperous city merchant that he is, is the embodiment of urban Australia, and of urban man everywhere, short sighted and rapacious, blind to the inner realities:

> I do not understand what all this talk is about. We are not children. We have only to consider the progress we have made. Look at our homes and public edifices. Look at the devotion of our administrators, and the solid achievement of those men who are settling the land. Why, in this very room, look at the remains of the good dinner we have just eaten. I do not see what there is to be afraid of.

Voss is a different kind of phenomenon altogether. He is introduced to the womenfolk as 'the explorer', soon to leave for the bush. Voss, in fact, intends to cross the entire continent on foot, but 'neither Mrs. Bonner nor Mrs. Pringle could be expected to take seriously a move so remotely conntected with their own lives.'

Neither can the majority of well-established townsfolk, in their tight, best coth and massive incredulity. Mr. Pringle reflects the common attitude of hostility towards any penetration below the surface of life:

> It seems to me, though, from such evidence as we have collected - which is inconsiderable, mark you - as the result of mere foraying expeditions from the fringes, so to speak, it seems this country will prove most hostile to anything in the nature of planned development. It has been shown that deserts prefer to resist history and develop along their own lines. As I have remarked, we do not know. There may be, in fact, a veritable paradise adorning the interior. Nobody can say. But I am inclined to believe, Mr. Voss, that you will discover a few blackfellers, and a few flies, and something resembling the bottom of the sea.

The irony is, as White sees it, that Voss is totally without interest to them as a man. He is already, before he leaves, a statue, something on a column, 'a memorial to their own ([!sic] achievement.' The truth is that all these people are living in a mental world that belongs elsewhere, unconnected with deeper reality of the real world, playing an elaborate game of colonial pretense that is itself a veritable allegory of the human condition:

> the Palethorpes continued to sip their tea, themselves superior milky white, like the cups they had brought out from Home. No coarse stuff. They sat and listened to the rather melancholy accompaniment of their stomachs, and were soon walking in the rain in the neighbourhood of Fulham, their spiritual environment.

Voss himself, however, is also a figure of some contradiction, a personality at war within himself, certainly, I should say, a symbol of questing mankind itself. To what extent he is to be identified with White is not certain, but it seems likely, as commentators have noted, that White, the expatriate Australian who had sought to identify himself with Europe, and failed, is to some degree at least the literary incarnation of the returning 'explorer' who must discover his inner identity in an Australia that is strange and unknown to him.

In this sense, as is indicated explicitly enough in the novel, the real journey of exploration is through 'the country of the mind', and the mission to the interior

is really a psycho-spiritual quest 'to explore the depths of one's own repulsive nature'. In Frost's words

> Your head so much concerned with outer,
> Mine with inner, weather.
>
> (Tree at my Window)

And with this destination in mind, Patrick White abandons the naturalist and realist treatment of the land that has hitherto characterised Australian fiction. Here the land will function as a catalyst in Voss' journey of self discovery, as an essential element in an allegory of human endeavour. The land becomes the destroyer of human pride and pretension, the telluric rod that reduces man to his proper pygmy size, and which compels recognition of the pathetic weakness of the individual. The Nietzchean hero who imposes himself on life by the strength of will - superman of pseudo-scientific fancy - is progressively reduced to an acknowledgement of his dependence and helplessness, and to confession of his humanity.

One can thus see how the symbol of Voss far outstrips any mere relationship to White himself. A thesis of universal validity is being argued, so that the central figure of the explorer assumes a multidimensional interpretative capacity, a larger than life stature in the Byronic manner that transcends both White and the explorer Leichardt, upon whom the character is historically based.

In Spanish-American fiction it is Gallegos' Marcos Vargas who most closely approaches the character of Voss, but he fails to achieve the universalism of Voss in that he remains too closely enwrapped in Venezuelan culture. Nevertheless, some of the essential elements of Voss are present in Canaima, where the direct encounter with the forces of a wild and unknown interior both measures the stature of the hero and leads to an illumination of his place in the scheme of things. The power of Voss, however, is that the whole action is swept up into the heady realm of myth, in which the Australian setting merely subserves

the universal nature of the problem explored, an achievement of which Gallegos falls short.

The problem of man coming to terms with life, of adjusting himself to a world that is congealed mystery, is already the theme of The Tree of Man, in which the novelist concluded that nothing might be known with any certainty. That novel was also the tragedy of men and women imprisoned behind their various personas, incapable of really meaningful contact. This dilemma is still present in Voss, but this novel goes a good deal further in probing for meaningfulness. Voss is progressively forced to a recognition of his 'own smallness in the immense landscape', and is compelled to make 'the long journey back in search of human status'. The ancient Christian virtues of love, compassion and humility emerge as primary virtues as the journey through the purgatorial continental interior and his prostration before his aboriginal killers, brings Voss to an acknowledgement of his personal insufficiency. The land is thus not the measure of a man's worth as

demonstrated through his triumphant meeting of a supposed earth challenge, but is rather the divine instrument of Voss's humiliation and abasement.

For Voss is presented as the very embodiment of the self-sufficient man. 'Future', he says, 'is will'. No man is strong, he holds, who depends on others. A deep scorn for the common run of man must be the consequence of such a view of life. There lies, of course, a fundamental sense of dislocation at the root of this attitude, a sick sense of not belonging to human society, of being a thing apart from it, of holding human society in contempt. That no man is an island unto himself is a reality of life of which the novelist is intensely aware; his characters either squirm in mental torture in the knowledge or suspicion of this - aware of the need for contact and yet not knowing how to breach the silence (The Tree of Man) - or, like Voss, attempt to go it alone, to deny the need, in response to anteceding compulsions of a psychic nature that are never

precisely defined, nor need to be.

The 'country' then is life itself, of which, as Laura Trevelyan says, most people are afraid, and will not say so. In the end Voss confesses that fear has been the motivating force of his life:

> He himself, he realized, had always been most abominably frightened, even at the height of his divine power, a frail god upon a rickety throne, afraid of opening letters, of making decisions, afraid of the instinctive knowledge in the eyes of mules, of the innocent eyes of good men, of the elastic nature of the passions, even of the devotion he had received from some men, and one woman, and dogs. Now, at least, reduced to the bones of manhood, he could admit to all this and listen to his teeth rattling in the darkness.

This is a complete volte face from his first confident assertion that most people fear the country, not realizing that they can make of it what they wish.

The unfolding narrative has thus become a case study of the reduction of human pride and pretension as it is exemplified in the person of Voss himself.

One might indeed see it as a theological treatise, for the parallel constantly drawn throughout the novel is that of Voss' identity with Christ, the god reduced to man, who through suffering learns to submit himself to the law of love. 'It is only human sacrifice', Laura Trevelyan reflects when it is all over, 'that will convince a man that he is not god.'

The land, 'the infinite distances', is to be the reducer of Voss' stature. Not for him the trivialities of daily existence. Somewhere, somehow, he is convinced, the ultimate meaning of life will be disclosed, if only one is prepared to push life to its limits. He will 'not stop short of the throne'; 'Places yet unvisited can become an obsession, promising final peace, all goodness', 'in the infinite distances ... all would finally be resolved', somehow he will 'split open the rock, and discover the final secret'. One can scarcely resist the parallel here with Moses, the Old Testament leader of an expedition through the

Sinaitic deserts, who, needing water in the wilderness, struck the rock to bring forth water in an angry assumption of divine power, a sin for which he was denied entry to the promised land, and perished in the desert. Clearly, we are to understand the blasphemous nature of Voss' presumption, for he immediately goes on to assume, triunely, Jehovah's own name and title - 'I am, I am, I am.'

The theme is already familiar from The Tree of Man. The final secret cannot, of course, be known, certainly cannot be forced from the closed lips of the world. Voss will put his shoulder to the wheel of life, and it will turn and crush him. When Jackie, the aborigene, finally hacks off Voss' head with a clasp knife, and 'the head thing knocked against a few stones and lay like any melon', the mystery still remains: 'Whether dreams breed, or the earth responds to a pint of blood, the instant of death does not tell.'

Hence the confident expedition that sets out is progressively reduced by the great expanses and the shimmering heat to a pathetic wreckage. The dialogue that Voss sustains throughout the journey with his companions serves all the time to demonstrate his inordinate self-confidence and his scornful rejection of humility as a proper attitude to adopt in the face of life. The inner dialogue with Laura, in his dreamtime, reflects his struggle with other, less egotistical forces at work within him. The proud words and the boastful exterior concealed a core of inner uncertainty and self-doubt.

At the epic level we can see Voss as questing humanity, ever seeking to extend its frontiers into the regions of the unknown, convinced of its course, and resolved to lay bare the secrets of the cosmos. His pride, so over-weening and imperious, is the conquering spirit of the race*.

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* Nor should we forget that White lived as a serving officer through a war waged by those dedicated to the Nietzchean political philosophy of the super-race, which, like the apocryphal horseman, 'went forth conquering and to conquer', with what catastrophic

For cast though the action is in the nineteenth century hinterland of Australia, the Nietzchean die of the hero who seeks to put his imprint upon history by the presumptuous fiat of his will lends itself all too clearly to the image of modern, technological man convinced that all things may be put under his feet, that all things and all knowledge are within his grasp, the perennial heresy and doomed, the novelist seems to be saying, to final disappointment and frustration. It is the exercise of human values as opposed to the boastful assertion of the ego that will bring salvation. Voss first enters the great continent as by some 'doit de seigneur'; but it is one of his party, Le Mesurier, who articulates an attitude of humility before life, based on a confession of predestined human inadequacy before the cosmic mystery which Voss perceives to be true and ends by embracing:

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result for humanity we all know. And Voss, we shall recall, is German.

> The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming.

Voss' thesis, given expression in terms of the novel, is appropriately matched by Seidenberg in the essay, 'Man's Tenure of the Earth', and which may serve as a scientist's post-script to the novel. Speaking of the conquest of Mount Everest as the last symbol left on earth of inconquerable Nature, he says:

> It would have been singularly appropriate to have preserved it inviolate, if only as a universal symbol of man's place in the infinity of nature.*

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* Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth, p.734, ed. by W.L. Thomas, University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Chapter 10

Some Conclusions of a Comparative Nature.

Our survey of some of the important novels of the land - the product of emergent, ex-colonial societies in two continents - has lain bare some significant themes.

First, there are themes which Australian and Spanish American novelists have in common, and which have inspired similar attitudes in both continents. Without being exhaustive, some of the more important of these themes (which are always major themes, central to the novelist's purpose) may be listed as follows:

City versus Country
Idealization of Rural Man
Aspiration towards the Simple Life
Pastoral as a realizable ideal
Pastoral and Rural utopianism
Idealization of the indigenee
Nature as hostile to man
The moral stature of man as measured by his response to environmental challenge

Outrage at the violation of Nature
Cults of aggressive masculinity in settler societies
'Mateship' as forged in the vicissitudes of colonial and pioneer life.

It is noteworthy that it is the novel of the pampas in Spanish America (Uruguay and Argentina) that most closely matches Australia in most of these respects, for in these temporate and sub-tropical lattitudes the environment favoured the spawning of similar societies - societies built on livestock and grain.

Of course, not all the novelists have all of these themes in common with one another, but they are themes that some Australian novelists share with Spanish American novelists, and this, I contend, is a phenomenon conditioned partly by (a) the common stock of cultural notions both peoples inherit from their European past, and partly by (b) the common human response that urbanised man makes to the pioneer challenge.

There are, also, themes that emerge in the writers of both continents that are peculiar to each continent and find no trans-continental parallel. There is, for example, no Australian parallel to the Spanish-American 'green hell' novel, in which the land - by which is meant the tropical jungle and rain forest - is totally inimical to man, and is conceived of as an environment unnatural to modern man. But that is not surprising, since Australia has no green hell, although the view of the environment as an inimical and degrading force is emphatically present. On the other hand Spanish America can produce no counterpart to the very special way in which Patrick White bends a pioneer setting to explore the mental and spiritual limits of mankind, to investigate the human psychic hinterland.

In both cases, however, the novel of the land finds its origins in the quest for what was unique

to the life of the two continents. This meant that the novelist tended to set his eyes upon the exotic possibilities of the life of the continental hinterland rather than upon the cities, whose way of life corresponded more to the already familiar European models, and hence forfeited any claim to uniqueness. The interest in the land as the matrix of the character of the new people emerges along with an incipient nationalism.

The best Australian land novelists tend to interpret the past from the vantage point of the present; and there are good reasons for finding in the land the significant and decisive focus of interest:

> until a couple of generations ago, when Australia began to cultivate her industries, the centre of practical interest was almost inevitably the countryside; this still contained the bulk of the population and remained the centre of business activities, and the cities, great as had been their relative growth, still existed mainly as its organs. Apart from practical interests, two other factors were extremely important; there was the traditional feeling that to settle and develop their back country was the first duty of Australians, and there was also the belief that the essence of Australia, its most characteristic types and scenes and incidents, were connected with the soil and its inhabitants and products and direct influences

> rather than with the comparatively cosmopolitan cities ... Connected with it on the literary side, and perhaps most influential of all in preserving in Australian literature what may be called the cult of the countryside, is the feeling, conscious or unconscious, that by reason of its suggestions of adventure, the unusual, the unknown, this is the natural sphere to turn to for the setting of a story ... reinforced by a nostalgic harking back, even among the sophisticated and unillusioned, to days and places which stand in the mind for a simpler life and simpler virtues and vices...*

In 1856, Frederick Sinnet, surveying the prospects for the emergence of the Australian novel, reflected on the fact that all the materials for such a novel were at hand: what was lacking was the interpretative writer capable of seeing human nature adapting itself to the motley Australian street and the silent bush. All that had been produced up to that time were stories and sketches largely concerned with external manners and scenes, and little that attempted to penetrate below the surface to the qualities of character that the colony was developing. **

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* H.M. Green, A History of Australian Literature, p.1068, Vol. II, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1961.

** The Fiction Fields of Australia, p.31, University of Queensland Press, 1966; first published in the Journal of Australasia, Vol.I, June-December, 1856.

Both his expectations have since been fulfilled, and especially so with respect to the novel of the land. But, as in the case of Spanish America, it is the twentieth century that has produced the most accomplished interpreters of the pioneer era.

As Sinnet was writing, the young Henry Kingsley was absorbing the Australian scene during his visit to the goldfields, and, three years after Sinnet published his Fiction Fields, he presented the world with Geoffrey Hamlyn (1859), with its picture of an English upper class squatter family, of the kind so hated by the labouring classes that Penton was to feature some seventy-five years later. The feeling for character that Sinnet hoped for is not developed: the characters remain, by and large, obstinately non-Australian (as, perhaps, they were). But the sense of occasion, the awareness of the epic significance of the pioneer condition is very marked.

For Kingsley, it is the old biblical pastoral epic that the scene brings to mind: '(we) saw the scene so venerable and ancient, so seldom seen in the Old World - the patriarchs moving into the desert with all their wealth.' For him, the European emigrants are entering upon their promised land, an image not scorned by modern Australian writers, although Judith Wright adds to it the pertinent notion of the Exodus from slavery in her poem Bullocky:

> All the long straining journey grew
> a mad apocalyptic dream,
> and he old Moses, and the slaves
> his suffering and stubborn team ...
>
> Grass is across the waggon tracks,
> and plough strikes bone beneath the grass,
> and vineyards cover all the slopes
> where the dead teams were used to pass.
>
> O vine, grow close upon that bone
> and hold it with your rooted hand.
> The prophet Moses feeds the grape,
> and fruitful is the Promised Land.

In his awareness of the land itself, however, Kingsley bears comparison with the best of the moderns, and some of the finest lyrical descriptions of the Australian scene come from his pen, and as such a descriptive writer he is one of the earliest pointers to

the direction that the Australian novel was to take.

To return to the historical nature of the Australian land novel: the Australian novelist has shown himself more inclined to return to the past for an explanation of the present than his Spanish-American counterpart. Prichard, Penton, Dark and White all locate their action in the past, whereas we are scarcely aware of history in comparable Spanish - American writers, with the exception, perhaps, of Guiraldes in Don Segundo, and even here the past is a recent, muted thing. The recreation of history as a literary precision instrument for the dissection of the present - the historical and quasi-historical novel - clearly has attraction for Australian writers that it lacks for their Spanish-American counterparts. (This is not to suggest that Spanish-America has no historical novel: in this respect Romanticism made its mark as firmly as it did elsewhere; but the twentieth century writer feels less need to return to the epic agricolan past since it is, perhaps, more of a present reality

than it is in Australia.) As I have already suggested, it is Argentina, which most closely approximates Australia physically, that comes closest to it in its treatment of the land theme. Furthermore, it is precisely those countries of Spanish-America which display the greatest physical dissimilarities that are furthest from the historical approach to the land novel.

This invites the conclusion that it is those areas that have submitted to human domination that reveal in their writers the strongest sense of history: in the tropical regions there is no past; Nature displays the same unchanging and unchanged face, and man can point to little that he has succeeded in changing - on the contrary, the green vegetal sea is forever on the point of re-engulfing man and all his works. In Australia, on the other hand, the battle is essentially over, the victory won. Man is triumphant to the extent, indeed, that the ecological threat is a very real and present one: all that remains is for literature to examine the historical implications

of the epic struggle with the land.

Despite, however, all the coincidences of the initial colonial impulse in the two continents - the voyages of discovery of Spanish, Dutch and English navigators, the wholesale expropriation of overseas territories in the name of the sovereigns, the establishment of the familiar colonial pattern of Viceroyalties, followed by the systematic introduction of settler and Christian missionaries, the confrontation with native peoples and their reduction to inferior status, the growth of agricultural and mining economies and of peoples moulded by the demands of new lands, the problems created through interracial cross breeding, the movements towards independence from the mother countries, and the great population accretions in both continents of diverse European nationalities (Spanish, German, Italian, English and French, in the case of Spanish-America, and English, German, Italian, Greek and Chinese in the case of Australia) - some interesting differences characterise the English

and Spanish overseas adventures, which are at least as important as the similarities.

Spanish and Australian novelists are agreed in seeing in the rural and not in the city man the repository of true 'Spanish Americanism' or true 'Australianism'. Behind this attitude lies the older cultural dictate that forever saw the city at war with the country, seeing in city man a corruption from which rural man was free. The peculiarities of colonization were such in both continents that two breeds of men were indeed created: the coastal man, dwelling in the coastal cities, and the man of the interior, suspicious of the smart city ways and antagonistic to city control. The wealth of the people, furthermore, stemmed from the land and not from the city pen-pushers. Novelists in both continents condemn the desire not to dirty one's hands (Reyles and Penton, for example) that has been bred into the 'gentleman': work is a virtue especially desirable in a developing society.

In Australia (despite Penton's distasteful grimaces in this respect) more than in Spanish-America the values of the working man triumph and succeed in constituting a national

ideal, together with its egalitarian concomitants. In this sense the novelist is at one with a corresponding social reality. In Spanish America, however, the peasant or gaucho ideal remains something of an aspiration that is denied by the social fact. The paradoxical elevation of the gaucho in a non-egalitarian society must be seen as something of a literary man's imposition, a romantic by-way, an idea rather than a reality. The Spanish-American equivalent of the Australian Squattocracy is a landed gentry in a sense that Australian pastoralists never were. There never was the levelling process that was such a marked feature of Australian social growth. Founded in a later time, Australia never had the semi-feudal sub-stratum that modern Spanish-American society inherits, and neither had she the enormous casta and indigenous population that laboured under a sense of its inferiority before the white creole aristocracy of Spanish-America. There is no Australian equivalent of the peon, whatever the word's relationship with pioneer might seem to suggest. Even the itinerant shearers of Australia were likely to have their own 'selection'.

Nevertheless, the note of social conflict and class antagonism is by no means absent from the Australian land novel: Penton serves as a caustic exemplar of this. The divisions go so deep as almost to create two separate nations. Eleanor Dark makes the same point in her historical recreation of the days of the first settlement.

Both literatures reveal an ambivalent attitude towards man's relationship to the earth he treads. In Spanish-America one is tempted to say that this is simply the difference of attitude that the plains as opposed to the jungle provoke, and indeed this goes a long way towards explaining the dichotomy, but it does not go all the way. Rivera, for instance, has the action of his novel set in both the plains and the jungle, and his reaction is equally hostile (and unhostile) to both.

Such geographical extremes do not exist in Australia, and yet the identical ambivalence exists, even within the pages of the same novel. Certainly the extremes of horror towards the land that we find in Rivera and

Gallegos are unmatched in Australian fiction, and this undoubtedly owes much to the overwhelming nature of the tropical jungle. Yet even in Rivera there is more than a suggestion that although the jungle is inimical to man, the human intrusion is an unholy violence that the jungle is right to resist.

What I am suggesting, then, is that in both literatures there is an underlying attitude to Nature that is culturally conditioned from Europe. It is even likely that man is presently conditioned by imperatives that flow through him from his evolutionary past: the dawn of self-consciousness (of self-knowledge, which is the biblical Fall from innocence) has created an angst which itself is the price man must pay for cogniscence of evolution. Hence man is both aware of belonging to the Natural world, and yet is painfully sensitive to his increasing isolation from it (symbolised by the city and his increasingly 'unnatural' life). Predictably, he cannot decide whether he is better off in isolation from, or in identification with, the Natural

world. The physical virtues that were important in his earliest struggles to survive, and which have always been the true test of his worth, are no longer valid in the bricks and morter world. What happens, then, when urban man and rural man find themselves in confrontation, or when urban man finds himself translated once again into rural man? The novelist in the pioneering countries attempts to answer this question and point to a solution, and we must not be surprised to find him in two minds.

Gallegos argues for a compromise between city and country virtues; barbarism must be tamed by civilization and a fusion of old and new is seen as possible. Nevertheless, the primitive life of the land, with its philosophy of the survival of the fittest - and therefore of the most ruthless- is viewed with civilized distaste: the 'land' is most prone to brutalize.

For Penton, too, the land is a brutalizing force. calling forth the least admirable traits in human character. On the other hand, the city is for him even less inviting:

at least on the land a man looks what he is and there is a primitive integrity in his violence, but in the city violence hides behind smart clothes and cultivated speech, and all is pretense and hypocrisy.

Reyles, too, is filled with antipathy for the city products on much the same grounds that Penton is. But he is in no doubt as to the relative virtues of town versus city: the land wins every time, instructing man, as it does, in the virtues of honest work, and rewarding him with a deep satisfaction of soul. Clearly there are other factors which neither novelist shares in common with the other (convicts, for example, in Penton, and peonage is Reyles) which are important is determining their attitudes to their subject, yet it is significant how often (more often than not) that the land is seen as an ultimate measure of the man and as promoting virtues conceived of as desirable.

Katherine Prichard's admiration for the product of the land is undisguised: the Australia that appeals to her is the Australia of the bush, where men are unmistakeably

men, and where man's place in the scheme of things is unequivocal. Her vision in Working Bullocks is of a successful European transplant: the act of colonial grafting has succeeded; her characters feel and look at home in the new environment - a condition to which the settlers in Eleanor Dark's world are still aspirants.

Invariably the measure of a man's success is the extent to which he has adapted. The implications of Don Segundo are no whit different from those of, say, Working Bullocks: the man and his rural environment have become one.

In KSP's Coonardoo, Hugh is a failure, despite high promise, because he carries alien attitudes of mind into the bush. Gallegos' Marcos Vargas too is the ultimately unadapted Creole, the violent man entering upon a new environment as a conqueror, unwilling to learn in humility from a new world. He is on the way to his salvation when his spiritual torment gives way and is eased by an awareness of the inner integrity of the indian tribes, amongst whom he resolves to remain. The aspiration towards the simple life

is an accompanying pertinent theme, and invariably the mystical and neo-platonist influences are detectable in this context as well (no less in Spanish-American than in Australian novelists). This argues, I repeat, a common cultural response, or an inherent quality in Nature that provides a response in the human psyche, or both.

The green hell novel of Spanish-America stands apart, especially as we meet it in Rivera. In him the literary artist is exposing a romanticism that sees Nature as a benign entity, and thus rebels against the cultural conditioning of Europe. Here Nature displays an unfamiliar face, and a terrifying one. Rivera's acquaintance with the jungle came as a distinct shock to him, and consequently La Vorágine depicts the world of nightmare in which man is not in control, not in harmony, in which the vegetal forces remorselessly work and reduce human pretensions to nothing, annihilates them in fact. The mindless forces of the Darwinian vision are encountered face to face. The peculiar terror of Rivera's apprehension is that it makes mock of man's claim to being something special in the created world. Only Patrick

White can match Spanish-America in this, with his picture of a totally impassive interior that reduces man by its shear unending expense. It is not actively malignant, like Rivera's jungle; it simply is, and that is all, presenting an eternal question mark to the significance of man's existence.

Neo-platonic elements are sufficiently marked in all these novelists to attract attention and comment. I cannot doubt that cultural conditioning is peramount. How universal a phenomenon a sympahtetic reaction to the natural world is beyond the culture that has its origins in a Semitic and Greek and Roman past I am not competent to say. I suspect that, since humankind have the identical evolutionary andsocio-evolutionary past (and Nature worship is certainly not confined to Europe), we should find equivalents in all cultures. One thing is certain, and that is that Reyles' ideal of the 'natural' life that is morally superior because it is closely linked to Nature, and that fills man with a sense of ultimate things and an exaltation of the spirit, and that finds its echoes in Guiraldes and Gallegos, is identical

in essence with what we find in K.S. Prichard, in Eleanor Dark and, at times, in Penton. Rivera and Patrick White represent a negative tendency that equally has cultural roots in the past - and it is of interest to observe how both these writers return to biblical sources for the language and image of their negation.

A reflorescence of platonism (not as a philosophy, but as an attitude, upon which the first philosophy was erected) is entirely comprehensible in a pioneering context. A Europe already feeling the effect of physical and economic overcrowding could be expected to return with fervent relief to the prospect of a new and virgin world. That it did so react is a matter of historical fact demonstrated elsewhere in this thesis; that this reaction should find its place in the novel of these new lands in therefore only to be expected. The realization of the ancient pastoral ideal was, for a brief while, a tantalizing possibility in the new lands. A rural arcady proved to have as potent an allure as ever: the old society could be abandoned, and a new world of endless

potential could be realized, free of the shackles of industrialism and urban constriction. Man and Nature could once more be one, as the poets dreamed of.

Not surprisingly, the ideal was united, as it so often had been in the past, with utopianism. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century had already shown that man could build his ideal world through the exercise of his reason; both Australia and Spanish-America were aflame with the idea of a new and just society as a consequence of the French Revolution. What better place to build such a world than in the new continents? What environment could better stimulate the spirit of 'mateship', the spirit of equality and brotherhood that squared so admirably with the vision of a modern socialist utopia, than that of the open spaces? Australia, stemming from a more developed political tradition than the Spanish-Americas, was able to make something of the bush that his embryo counterpart (the gaucho) never succeeded in doing. Yet both societies have tended to elevate the countryman and the bushman as the ideal

kind of human being (Prichard, Penton; Guiraldes, Reyles), a man full of the skills necessary to conquer a challenging life, and animated by a spirit of faith in one's mates - a notion that springs from the lower levels of a society, from which also the utopian yearning springs.

The European encounter with the indigene in both continents led, historically, to conflicts of attrition, and, paradoxically, in literature, to idealization of the native. Again, this latter owes a good deal to a learned and cultural influence that derives from an older European civilization, and further underlines the cultural factor that compels similar notional and social phenomena in the experience of expatriate European peoples. Social concern and the consequent didactic tenor in the novelist not surprisingly characterises the land theme in both literatures, which may emerge as political utopianism,

as in Penton and Reyles, or as concern for the mistreatment of indigenes, as in Prichard and Gallegos, or as alarm for the disintegration of the environment, real or threatened, as in Dark and Rivera. There is a remarkable coincidence of thematic interest in the two literatures.

Nothing in the Australian novel compares with the note of violence that appears in its Spanish-American counterpart. This is not surprising, since the political condition in Australia has been so much more stable, nor has she had to fight for her independence, nor cope with the social consequences of a severely stratified and miscegenated society. And whereas there is a general similarity in the polarisation of city versus country, there never grew up in Australia such a powerful class of outback landowner commanding the loyalty of a rural population that was capable of presenting a challenge to central government. This is the feature,

that of human violence and lawlessness, that is the most important difference to emerge in Spanish-America's novel of the land. For the rest, our interest resides not so much in social and other differences as in the treatment and colouring of similar conditions of life that the two continental homelands imposed upon European racial transplants.

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